MAMMY ROSIE

ALBERT MORRIS BAGBY

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"Mammy Rosie"

BY

ALBERT MORRIS BAGBY

Author of "Miss Träumerei"

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MAMMY ROSIE

CHAPTER I.

ROSIE FINDS A HOME.

"I 's ben a fine seamstress; but my eyes is done give out an' I thought I 'd like to keep a respectable bachelder's depahtment."

"So you may, if you like. How soon can you come?"

"I can stay."

* * * * * * * * *

"I reckon dis ole cat done lan' on 'er feet when de good Lawd done drap 'er 'foh dis flat-house. Yes, she did. She suhtainly did."

CHAPTER I.

ROSIE FINDS A HOME.

"Well! If I could get a right good nigger to keep house for me—I don't mean a coloured person, but a right good *nigger*—I think I 'd take it."

"Excuse me, sir, I 'm only the janitor; but I 'd like to shake your hand. No one but a southerner could pronounce 'nigger' like that."

"Certainly," said Thornton, acquiescing, "we 've a way of recognising each other, have n't we?"

A fortnight later Reginald Thornton found himself installed in his new apartment with all the appurtenances of luxury and comfort save the much desired "nigger." However, this difficulty was quickly overcome, for the janitor, in his gratification at being of service to a gentleman of Southern grace and breeding, offered him the choice of two genuine "black pearls." Al-

though accustomed to the peculiarities of the coloured race, Thornton was, nevertheless, somewhat startled and inclined to laugh when William, the front-elevator boy, ushered in a mammoth negress of five-and-twenty, attired in the extreme of fashion and surmounted by a broad-brimmed hat bearing a tuft of nodding plumes.

"Miss Tubbs, suh, wants to do yoh cookin'."

"Oh!" exclaimed Thornton faintly, awed by the towering figure. "Do you cook?"

"They say I can. I 've been cook at Miss Williams' boarding-house in Fifteenth Street for two years; but the work is hard and I don't get time for practising."

"Practising?" gasped Thornton. "I should think you would get practice enough in cooking for so large a family."

"I mean the piano," said Miss Tubbs, airily. "I 'm soprano soloist at the coloured church in Ninth Avenue, and sing in concerts; and I 'm learning to play my own accompaniments."

"I fear my work would interfere with your career."

"Oh, no, sir; I 'm a quick worker, and I could practise on the piano when you are down town."

"I 'm a young man," said Thornton; "I require an older woman than you, and—one who is not comely."

Miss Tubbs' dusky countenance presented a comical mixture of flattered vanity and disappointment.

"Thank you for coming. Good-night."

"Good-night," faltered Miss Tubbs; but there was no misconstruing Thornton's forceful, though polite dismissal, and she reluctantly passed out.

Again the elevator stopped with a click, and William stood in the entry-door. "Here 's the other lady, suh."

"Lady!" sputtered an indignant voice. "Lady! Is n't yoh 'shamed o' talkin' dat way to de nobility 'bout a black African niggeh? Yoh 's done sp'iled my visit! Mule!"

William vanished in the wake of a wheezy guffaw, and the "lady" stood vaguely outlined in the dim entry until bidden to approach.

Silently, austerely, with the merest inclination of her gray head, she dropped a slight curtsey and planted her tall, gaunt figure just within the threshold. Her whole aspect, from the rusty

black of her bonnet to the hem of her ancient alpaca gown, bespoke a life of poverty and deprivation.

Compassion softened Thornton's voice as he indicated a chair.

"Thank yoh," she murmured, with dignified compliance; and clasping her hands over the crook of a bulging cotton umbrella, she regarded him with fixed gaze.

"Are you a cook?"

"I can cook a little."

Thornton smiled. "You probably cook very well."

"I 's ben a fine seamstress; but my eyes is done give out, an' I thought I 'd like to keep a respectable bachelder's depahtment."

"So you may, if you like. How soon can you come?"

"I can stay."

Thornton's eyes sparkled with suppressed humour; but the pathetic evidences of extreme poverty were ample explanation of her reply, and he proceeded at once and with pleasurable pride to explain the household routine to his new mammy.

But if the playing at keeping house tickled Thornton's fancy, the surprises in Roxana Landstreet's methods well-nigh paralysed it.

A funereal gloom, through which an expressionless black face flitted like a spectre, oppressed his home life and drove him back to his old haunts. His cheery greeting of "Rosie" induced only the wordless response of a curtsey; and his gentle commands seemed fated to intensify the resentment with which she silently regarded him.

The mystery, subtle and deep, which enveloped Rosie like a cloud, interfered with Thornton's appetite, and, at times, even robbed him of sleep. His health and happiness, his life and property perchance, depended upon Rosie's caprice.

Thornton's day-dreams of a loving and lovable *ante bellum* mammy were forgotten in the face of practical problems.

Finally a much belated meal, an explosion of verbal dynamite, and the old mammy's panic-stricken flight to the kitchen, precipitated the end of Thornton's forbearance and brought about the re-incarnation of Rosie.

Seated that evening in her low rocker before

the glowing coals in the kitchen range, her face buried in her hands, her grizzly head concealed in the twists of a Turkey-red bandana, Rosie moaned a postlude to the troublous events of the day:—

"My feet wuz set fast in de mire an' de clay in de bottom ob de pit; an' my eyes could n't see up to de daylight. He heard de cry ob de ole hongry niggeh whut nobody would n't listen to; an' when 'e cuss an' swoh, his righteous wohds buhned me like de slave whip: an', please Gawd, I done desehved et. Et 's de only how to keep niggehs in de strait an' narrow way. He done right! He done right! An' now de Lawd an' de Debbil is j'ined hands to pay me back fur bein' so vile! Dey 's done contrabanded my job; an' I 's got to go 'way ag'in an' drag dis ole bundle o' rheumatiz frew de homes ob sin an' mis'ry."

"Rosie!" said Thornton, suddenly appearing in the doorway.

"Lawd save me!" muttered the old darkey, sitting bolt upright and crossing herself. "My time 's done come!"

"Rosie! Do you hear?"

"Yes, Mr. Tho'nton." Rising stiffly, she turned to him in penitence and woe.

"Why have you annoyed me so persistently?"

"Dunno! Guess et 's 'cause yoh did n't kick up no hurrahs befoh, like ole marse."

"I don't like to do that. It makes *me* unhappy; and I want you to be contented here."

"I is!" exclaimed Rosie convulsively.

"You did n't act so."

"Guess dat 's 'cause I minded whut my ole great-gran'mammy said: 'Chile,' says she, 'tell some things an' keep moh.' So I says to myself, 'Roxana, I b'lieves yoh is n't in de wrong chu'ch an' yoh is n't in de wrong pew ef yoh does dat; fur yoh neveh kep' a bachelder's depahtment befoh an' yoh does n't know whut de young masteh likes.' "

"You know now," said Thornton, with a twinkle which lightened Rosie's mental horizon. "Keep it in mind and you will be sure of a good home."

"I 'll slip down to Seventh Avenue an' git my clo'es as soon as I reds up de dinin'-room," said Rosie chipperly. "I could shoot de woman whut kep' my trunk! I 'll take 'er de money I owes

'er an' call 'er a *mis'rable ole contraband niggeh.* Dey does n't half de niggehs know whut *contraband* means," she added with a sly look, "but et makes 'em awful mad to be called dat.

"Yes, I 's gone hongry," continued Rosie pensively, "an' I 's woh rags a-savin' money to 'scape de *night-doctehs* an' have a decent buryin'. An' please Gawd et 's done did; an' I is n't got to pay no moh. Ebery godly cent Sallie 's paid me fur sewin' went to de ondertaker-man; fur dat ole roomer-woman would 'a' sold my body to de night-doctehs—*night-buzzahds,* I calls 'em—fur de rent, ef I had n't 'a', shuh."

"Who is Sallie?"

"She 's my cousin whut 's a dressmakeh. She lives wid Hallud up in West Sixty-second street."

"Hallud! What is that?"

"Hallud? Why, dat 's Sallie's daughteh. Has n't you read 'bout 'er? Dey 's done published 'er in de papehs. Shuh! She 's one o' dem cullud gals whut wuz tuhned out up to de Norman College; only she is n't, fur she 's fair, like 'er Ma."

"Turned out? For what?"

"Dey 's done made 'er a teacheh."

"The *Normal* College!"

"Dat 's et."

"How old is Hallud?"

"Well, I does n't know, exac'ly; but I reckon she 'll be 'bout twenty-one de nex' time she takes 'er age."

"Hallud, Hallud," he mused; "never heard such a name."

"Reckon yoh 's clean done fohgot yoh Scriptures, honey. Does n't yoh mind dat place in de Bible whur et says, 'An' Hallud be thy name?' "

"Of course," cried Thornton, gesticulating in protest at his own stupidity. "What is her family name?"

"Dunno; I calls 'er Carteh, like 'er Ma's name. Sallie never tole me who Hallud's Pa wuz."

"Does n't she know?"

"Oh, I 'spec' so; but yoh see, I 's ben livin' in Washin'ton, an' Sallie, she 's had nine husbands."

"Nine husbands! Good Heavens! What did she do with them?"

"Oh, she jes' fed an' slep' 'em till dey died."

"Died?"

"Yes. Dey fell into de ribber ur got run oveh when dey wuz drunk, ur somep'in'."

"They all died?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Tho'nton," replied Rosie with great dignity. "Sallie *ain't no New Yohkeh. She buried her husbands.*"

"She could n't have remained a widow very long at a time."

"'Deed she did n't! De mos' wuz fur *two months!*" exclaimed Rosie, with pride. "Sallie always had luck gittin' husbands, an' gittin' rid ob 'em, too, when dey got too lazy; 'ceptin' once—an' dat wuz Jones. Gawd knows how she eveh come to take a coal-black African niggeh like him—a tasty woman like Sallie—fur de rest ob 'em wuz *fair* like huhself. She tole me, bein' as et wuz wah-times, dey wuz n't no pickin's; an' she had to take jes' whut she could git. Humph! Guess I 'd gone widout 'till moh yalleh ones 'ad growed up; an' she wuz sorry she had n't 'a' wid all de scand'lous goin's on 'foh she got shet ob 'im."

"Tell me that another time, or I shall be late for the play," said Thornton, beaming with delight at the new-found "mammy."

"All right, honey, I will," exclaimed Rosie, following him to the outer door. "Now, have a good time an' don't let de elected cahs run oveh yoh.

"De blessed Lawd is suhtainly come into de wildehness to nuhse 'is stahvin' chile back to life," mused she in regaining her domain.

Raising a window and catching up a broom, she made with it the sign of the cross. "Shoo! You ole Debbil. Git out!" she cried, viciously beating the air. "De Lawd done drap *yoh* sassiety! He don't paddle wid yoh in yoh canoe no moh! He 's jes' tickled to death wid de young masteh. Humph! Whut backin's dey 'll give Roxana! Won't I sass dat ole contraband niggeh good *now!*

"Debbil! Don't come back heah no moh," she hissed at the night as she slammed the window and secured the fastening; "fur de young masteh won't let yoh in.

"Sing on! Sing on!" she cried, turning exultantly to the little clock ticking merrily on the shelf. "But don't crack yoh sides: fur den yoh can't whistle me up in de mawnin' to git breakfus' fur de honey chile! Now mind yoh! I

does n't want yoh to be gittin' into no mischief while I 's out. Don't staht de week's washin', fur Gawd's sake."

Then a change came over Mammy Rosie's spirit as she turned down the gas and, deep in reflection, lingered a moment in the uncertain light.

"Yes," she concluded with a tremor in her voice, "yes, I reckon dis ole cat done lan' on 'er feet when de good Lawd done drap 'er 'foh dis flat-house. Yes, she did. She suhtainly did."

CHAPTER II.

ROSIE IN SOCIETY.

"My Lawd! Why dat's de real nobility whut me an' yoh's had heah to-day. I did n't know we wuz in Sassiety. Huh?"

* * * * * * * * *

"Oh, deah!" sighed Rosie, lost in meditation over the soothing teacup. "When yoh's caught in yoh dirty tricks, how tryin' et is. My Lawd!"

CHAPTER II.

ROSIE IN SOCIETY.

"Heah! Git up! Git right up!" called Rosie on Sunday morning. "My nose itches right on de end; an' dat means a man an' woman 's comin', an' fum de way de ketchen wall 's crackin' dey 'll be heah befoh yoh 's eat breakfus'. Now hurry up; fur I is n't goin' to cook fur no moh nur whut 's comin' to lunch to-day. 'Deed I is n't. 'Deed I is n't dat niggeh," she muttered, shuffling down the corridor.

"Oh, my Lawd," sighed Rosie, as she appeared with the breakfast tray, "I does n't know whut 't is; but somepin' awful 's goin' to happen."

"What is the matter?"

"I 's done gone dremp 'bout eggs."

"What does that mean?"

"Bad luck! *Mis'rable* luck! Why when Miss Mary dremp o' eggs, she 'd go jump right into

de kerridge an' drive 'way to spend de day; fur dere wuz shuh to be a row o' some kind on de place afoh night; an' et wa 'n't a big plantation neetheh—only two famblies livin' on et: but one ob de boys 'ud be shuh to fall an' crack 'is head or git et cracked by anuddeh debbil ob a boy, or Aunt Lizey 'u'd drap a iron on 'er foot."

"Where was the plantation?"

"In Maryland; jes' a good hossback ride fum Washin'ton, whur me an' Sallie went to live when young marse died an' left us ouh freedom befoh de wah."

"You know Washington people?"

"Humph! Guess dey is n't nobody whut I does n't!"

"Mrs. Hugh Melrose here in New York was a Miss——"

"Warrin'ton," cried Rosie. "I made 'er fust clo'es when she got bawned. Miss Annie, she wuz twins; her an' Miss Jinny. *Dey* wuz de *grandest royalties* in Washin'ton! When dey got married to dem two ole bruddehs, de Melroses, in Saint Allojesuses Chu'ch, de President an' all de big bugs wuz dere; an' deir Pa, de great Gin'ral Warrin'ton, wid 'is apple-ettes a-

stickin' out so—like little bob-tail wings—took 'em down de aisle."

"Mr. and Mrs. Frank Melrose are dead now."

"But de rich Melrose heah, he ain't; ole as 'e is," said Rosie with bitterness. "Does yoh know why? 'Cause dey ain't no place fur 'im to go to; dey won't have 'im nowhur: an' him a hund'ed yeahs ole, too! He 's jes' dat wicked dat ole Be'lzebub won't have 'im fur feah 'e 'll sp'ile de folks whut 's already in Hell! Umph!"

"Mrs. Frank Melrose left a daughter," remarked Thornton.

"Little Miss Jinny!" cried Rosie.

"She 's a young lady now."

"Dat baby? My Lawd! My Lawd! Dese is queer times! Whut 's gotten into de chillun? Dey did n't grow so fas' when I wuz a gal!"

"Her uncle and aunt have adopted her," continued Thornton. "They are all dining here Thursday."

"De Melroses? Thursday? Yoh had n't ought 'a' tole me dat, chile," observed Rosie, excitedly shaking her head. "I can't cook no dinneh fur dem folks.

"My Lawd!" she exclaimed at a sharp ring of

the door-bell. "De man an' woman 's come!"

"I 've made a mess of it," mused Thornton, "and all because she dreamed of eggs."

"Why do you hate the Melrose family so much that you won't cook dinner for them?" he anxiously inquired as Rosie placed a florist's box before him.

"*Hate* de Melrose fambly? Me? Why, chile! Don't yoh know why I does n't cook no dinneh de day dey 's heah? 'Cause I lubs Miss Annie an' little Miss Jinny so much I 's got to go downstaihs an' stay by deir sides de whole time dey 's in dis house!"

Thornton noticed Rosie's interest in the box, and, yielding a point to feminine curiosity, told her to open it.

"Is dey fum Miss Jinny?" she asked, upon uncovering a mass of exquisite roses and white lilacs. "O' co'se dey is. Lawd lub 'er soul, de sweet little toad!"

"No," said Thornton, with a mischievous twinkle. "They are from a married lady."

"Humph!" grunted Rosie, beginning to fuss restlessly around the room. "Humph! Oh, dese

New Yohkehs! Humph! De creatures! Humph! De married debbils! Humph!"

"This one 's a widow."

"Oh, my Lawd, don't say nothin' moh! Dey 's wuss! Dey makes lub to yoh! De *creatures!* De *widder fools* whut dey is! Humph! I does n't see why dem ole hens can't keep to de right track! Instid o' dat dey 's de bigges' jackasses goin'! Humph!"

"Are n't you a widow, Rosie?"

"Yes, thank Gawd! I is! An' de *men!* Umph! Umph! De creatures! De married *beasts* whut dey is! Umph!"

"What 's the matter? You seem down on everybody to-day."

"Guess et 's dem eggs I dremp 'bout. I knowed somepin' drefful 'u'd happen. Umph!"

"De poh chile," droned Rosie the length of the corridor, "I might 'a' knowed some ole widder fool 'u'd try to ruin 'im wid flowehs! De creature! De honey chile! Oh, my Lawd, et 's scand'lous! Umph!"

"Say, dahlin'," said Rosie, reappearing on the threshold, "is de—*lady* whut sent dem roses a-comin' to lunch?"

"I hope so."

"Den I 's glad dey is n't no pizen in de ketchen! I suhtainly is!" she continued, shuffling another retreat. "Ur—Humph!—Ur I 'd be a jail-bird afoh night! Lawd save de sweet chile fum dat ole debbil widder! Dey conjures yoh! Dey does! 'Deed dey does! Humph!"

A brief pause; and angry mutterings preceded another visit from Rosie. "Et 's de poh, deah husbands whut dey bawled deirselves silly oveh whut would n't know 'em now fur de paint an' de yalleh hair!" proclaimed Rosie from the door sill. "Oh, my Lawd, et 's scand'lous! An' whut makes 'em do et, fur Gawd's sake? Fur de uddeh women? Uh—Uh! Dey does et fur yoh an' de uddeh vile men, to *ketch* yoh.

"Misteh Tho'nton, chile," continued Rosie, shaking her forefinger impressively, "de dead can't come back! No, dey can't come back! Fur ef dey could, dey' d come an' do a piece o' talkin' to shame de creatures, an' scrape off de paint an' cut off de yalleh hair to make 'em look like picked birds: fur, wid et on yoh can't neveh tell 'em fum de huzzies in de streets—'ceptin' by de company dey keeps!"

"My widow," interrupted Thornton, foreseeing trouble at luncheon, "my widow has snow-white hair."

"Has she!" sputtered Rosie testily. "Dat ain't her fault! She 's got chillun ur somepin' to keep 'er straight."

"She has a grandson as tall as you."

"Guess dat boy wuz out skylarkin' 'round, ur she 'd dursent send dem flowehs. Uh, uh! De creature!"

"Don't blame her, Rosie," said Thornton blandly. "She 's a warm friend of mine."

"Oh!" exclaimed the old darkey, rolling her eyes. "A *warm* friend! Humph! Guess dat 's so!"

With wise nods and winks, Rosie shuffled round the room intoning her victory: "Uh—huh! Uh—huh! Uh—huh!"

"Oh, stop it, Rosie!" said Thornton, laughing self-consciously. "You know it is n't so!"

"Whut yoh 'cusin' yohself fur? Sinful folks always does dat. I is n't said nothin'."

Reaching the threshold she cried triumphantly, "But I 's found out!"

Urged on by jealous curiosity, Rosie prepared

luncheon with unwonted celerity, and was waiting in the entry when the clicking of the elevator announced the coming of the first guest, Mrs. Parkinson, a small blonde of youthful forty with just a touch of colour on her cheeks.

"You are Rosie?" she said, looking up with a friendly smile. "I have heard of you."

"Yes, Miss."

"What a sweet place!" cried Mrs. Parkinson, ignoring her frigid reception. "But what are you doing with a stairway in an apartment?"

"That leads to the kitchen and sleeping rooms at the rear," spoke Thornton, coming from the library with a cordial greeting.

"I should so love to see them."

"Certainly. Is my room in order?" he inquired in low tones of Rosie, who posed like a model for Tragedy, with one hand still on the door, as if urging the departure of the unwelcome guest.

"Yoh bed ain't made," she replied stiffly.

"Then go make it, quick; and call me when to bring Mrs. Parkinson up. We will wait here in the entry."

They were seated on a low settle before the open door when Rosie reappeared at the head of

the stairs. Two other guests, stepping from the elevator at that moment, heard her cry with sardonic humour:

"Walk right up, Miss; de bed 's all ready!"

"White hair!" muttered Rosie, closing the kitchen door to keep out the visitors and the noise of their mirth. "Gran'muddeh! Humph! De huzzy! De men! De men beasts whut dey is! Dey 's all alike, de vile wretches! Oh, my Gawd, I 's got to swoller some tea ur I can't neveh git down dem steps no moh!"

Stubborn resentment of the fancied deception and indignity practised by Thornton, dulled Rosie's senses during the early part of the meal. A devilish spirit of revenge incited her to respond in an audible whisper, when Thornton made a third unheeded appeal for some saucers which she had failed to send down on the dumb-waiter: "Does yoh want me to expose yoh heah befoh de ladies?"

"Don't mind Rosie," said Thornton indulgently, after a trip upstairs for the saucers. "Her rheumatism gives versatility to her humour."

His patient words and the unmistakable gentle breeding of the guests slowly cleared Rosie's

mental vision: and it was a very dignified, though penitent, old mammy that finally emerged from the pantry, as Thornton said softly: "She does n't know which it is."

"Rosie," called an imposing matron, whose snow-white hair had hitherto escaped the darkey's notice, "you have arranged my flowers with so much taste, I have asked Mr. Thornton to let you show my butler how you do it."

"Oh, thank you, Madam," she replied meekly with her most gracious curtsey, "I am shuh yoh must be a southe'n lady."

* * * * * * * * *

"Oh, deah!" sighed Rosie, lost in meditation over the soothing teacup. "When yoh 's caught in yoh dirty tricks, how tryin' et is! My Lawd!"

"Hello!" cried Thornton, fresh from his departing guests. "What now? A moral katzenjammer?"

"Ef et 's somepin' right bad, I guess I 's got et," moaned Rosie. "Honey," she said, looking him sheepishly in the eyes, "de good Lawd done 'p'inted one day in de yeah fur all de folks to be jackasses. Does yoh mind readin' 'bout et in de Bible?"

"I don't recall it," said Thornton gravely. "Where is it?"

"Dunno," said Rosie. "My ole great-gran'-mammy tole me. 'Chile,' says she, 'when de Lawd made de Yarth fur Adam an' Eve he thunk et 'nough: but jes' like yoh an' all de uddeh chillun dey wanted moh. So ole sarpent Satan he sneaked 'em off to de Lawd's best apple tree whut 'e done hid fur 'isself; an' when dey done gobbled apples fit to bust, dey hea'd de Lawd callin' 'em. Dey tried to run 'way an' wuz so full dey tumbled on de ground wid de turriblest stummick-aches whut neveh wuz n't befoh o' sence.

" 'He knowed Adam an' Eve wuz n't all bad, ef dey wuz n't all good; but 'e had to stop 'em fum goin' on moh toots somehow. So 'e tole 'em dey could have Thanksgivin', an' Christmas, an' New Yeahs an' de Fou'th o' July fur carryin' on decent like, ef dey 'd do all deir cussedness in *one* day. Dat all happened de Fust o' April. Dat 's why et 's Fool's Day now: an' ef yoh fohgits et, yoh 's shuh to be one anuddeh day.' Dis day wuz mine!"

"No," said Thornton gently, shaking his head,

"it was your good day. You learned a wholesome lesson, and you made us laugh away sorrow and care."

"Guess dat nice Misteh Dick done laff 'way de mos'," exclaimed Rosie, with relaxed countenance. "He jes' cracked 'is sides. An de *lovely* widder-madam: whut is 'er name?"

"Mrs. Hampton-Yorke."

"Not de great royalty whut lives down de street?"

"The same."

"De queen ob 'em all?"

"Yes, if any woman is."

"My Lawd! Why dat 's de real nobility whut me an' yoh 's had heah to-day! I did n't know we wuz in Sassiety!"

"What did you expect?"

"Well, dahlin', I wuz a ole fool. I wuz jes' 'spectin' to pack my trunk an' git, ef I did n't 'prove o' yoh lady frens. Bachelders raises sech huzzas! An' I does n't ea'n my bread in no dissipated house. No suh! Yoh need n't ax me to! I ea'ns et outside!"

"Were n't the Melroses guarantee of my respectability?" inquired Thornton humorously.

"I did n't know ef yoh knowed moh like 'em. Yoh men is vile, yoh is! Yoh 's vile."

"Why, Rosie!" exclaimed Thornton, genuinely wounded by her rancour. "Is that your opinion of me?"

"Co'se not, co'se not, chile! I does n't mean *yoh!* I mean yoh *men!* Yoh 's vile, yoh *men* is! 'Deed yoh is! Vile! Et 's lucky fur yoh dat yoh 's got Roxana heah to keep yoh decent an' clean! She 'll take care ob de nobility fur yoh! Uh—huh! Seventh Avenue don't see her no moh! Sech vile niggehs as dey is dere!"

"One minute!" interrupted Thornton. "Can't you get one of them to serve dinner on Thursday?"

Rosie's head sank humbly and her voice faltered: "Dat 's my punishment fur bein' a fool today. My bones done tole me yoh would n't trust me no moh in de dinin'-room wid de nobility. I won't act dat way no moh, honey," said Rosie imploringly. "I 's a house-niggeh, ef I is a mule; an' dese New Yohk niggehs is fum de cawn-fiel's an' de woods. Dey is n't had no learnin'. Why befoh de wah, us house-niggehs wuz jes' as 'ristocratic as ouh white relatives.

We did n't 'sociate wid no black leavin's! 'Deed we did n't!"

"It is unfortunate," persisted Thornton, thinking of his best interests, "but we must have assistance. Can you provide it?"

"Yes," sighed Rosie. "I knows a yalleh gal, Peachy, whut does dat. Oh, my Gawd! I 's got to have anuddeh swoller o' tea to fohgit 'er!"

"Please don't!" cried Thornton earnestly. "I want Peachy here on Tuesday. Mr. Wynne is coming to dinner. We 'll try her on him first."

"Whut Mr. Wynne?"

"Mr. Dick, who was here to-day—Mr. Dick Wynne."

"Wuz 'is Ma a Carroll?"

"Yes."

"Thank Gawd!" exclaimed Rosie, perceptibly moved. "Roxana 's wid 'er own kind ag'in. Honey, ebery cloud does n't rain. De sky wuz all black when I lef' Seventh Avenue. Yoh 's done tuhned et all blue fur me. Ef yoh *is* a bachelder, yoh 's a decent one!"

CHAPTER III.

ROSIE BECOMES REMINISCENT.

"Poh Dr. May, he's settin' up in Hebben to-day a-cussin' dem boxes."

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"Yoh's jes' like Misteh Jinkinses second wife. She wuz a ole maid; an' when she come a-prancin' in wid 'er new laws, she r'ared mos' out o' de top o' de house."

CHAPTER III.

ROSIE BECOMES REMINISCENT.

A typical African laugh, insistent as a donkey's bray, though less strident, reverberated in the corridor and startled Thornton.

"Whua! Whua! Whua! Whua!" screamed Rosie, as the grocer's boy turned his puzzled gaze from the open-mouthed paper bag under his arm to the pool of crushed eggs at the elevator door. "Dem egg-shells 'll be elegant fur settlin' coffee!

"My Lawd, chile," said Rosie, coming in with the breakfast-tray, "I is n't had as much fun befoh, sence de day when I got bawned."

"*Fun* the day you were born? What do you mean?"

"I means I wuz so *glad* to be bawned. I loves life, does n't yoh? I reckon dey is n't no too much fun a-pokin' 'round up in Hebben wid all dem pious folks. Dey is n't gay 'nough fur me. 'Deed **dey is n't!**"

"You should say, 'I have n't had as much fun since I was born,' " observed Thornton.

"Now, look y' heah, chile; yoh neveh had none befoh, did yoh? So whut 's de use o' talkin' dat way, fur Gawd's sake? Now jes' look at dat," she continued in disgust, holding up a raspberry box. "Dey 'll soon be up to de top wid de bottoms ob de things, bless Gawd, ef dey keeps on settin' de bottoms higher."

"That is true," observed Thornton. "There is already more space underneath than in the top."

"Et used to make Dr. May so mad when 'e 'd go to buy 'em," said Rosie, intent upon the shallow depth of the box. "Poh Dr. May! He 's settin' up in Hebben to-day a-cussin' dem boxes!

"Is yoh goin' down town?" inquired Rosie, squinting her eyes at the sun.

"Yes. Why?"

"Well, ef yoh 's goin', yoh 'd betteh go befoh et gits hot: fur et 's jes' as hot as et can be now. I 's got to go, too!"

"Down-town?"

"An ole niggeh like me? No, suh! I knows how to paddle my own canoe: but I does n't trust myself whur all dem vile men is! No, suh! 'Deed

I does n't! I 's goin' oveh to Bloomin'dale's to buy myself a paih o' fifty-cent cawsets. Mine 's woh out; an' I can't take nothin' o' my clo'es off, widout takin' cole; an' I *won't* put on my *Sunday cawsets.* Dey is too good! Miss Smith, whut 's now in Paris, gib 'em to me; an' dey cost two ur three dollahs a paih, too—so dey did! No, suh-ee! I is n't goin' to weah dem Sunday cawsets dis week-day, ef Mr. Dick is comin'. How 's 'is *Ma?* How *is* Miss Lizzie?"

"Not very well. They 've taken a place at Westbury."

"Is 'e got to go out dere ebery night, fur Gawd's sake? Why does n't 'e sleep wid us?"

"Ask him."

The following day Rosie entered the dining-room as Peachy, a quick-eyed, intelligent mulatto girl, carried in the post-prandial coffee.

"Whur 's yoh sleepin' to-night, Mr. Dick?" inquired Rosie, after amusing the two young men with reminiscences of the Carrolls and the Wynnes.

"At the club."

"De club? Is n't dat an awful place?"

"Sometimes."

"Den, why does n't yoh stay wid us? We 'll git out de trundle-bed, an'——"

"Oh, Miss Rosie," interposed Peachy, who already considered herself one of the household, you know there is a lovely spare room upstairs."

"An'—" continued Rosie, with perceptible disapproval of Peachy's interruption, "I 'll gib yoh de bes' Southe'n breakfus'!"

"I am sure of that, Rosie: but this hot weather I 've taken to bread and milk."

"Yoh can have dat, too," cried Rosie with boundless hospitality. "Good home-made bread, an'—good home-made milk!"

"I 'll send my bag 'round on Thursday," laughed Dick. "Mr. Thornton has been good enough to invite me for dinner."

"Wid Miss Annie an' little Miss Jinny? Won't dey be glad to see yoh!"

"Now, Mr. Dick," said Rosie, at parting, "do be ca'eful o' yohself an' gib my lub to yoh Ma! Good-night." At the threshold she faltered and turned in evident embarrassment. "Misteh Dick, I hope yoh 's fohgot how scand'lous I behaved Sunday. Ef I 'd only knowed who yoh all wuz!" she sighed. "Yoh see, bachelders

always has deir biggest hurrahs on Sunday. An' Mr. Tho'nton did n't 'splain to me. Oh, please don't laff at 'im, Misteh Dick. He does 'is best; an' I 's heah now to keep 'im in de right track! Good-night! An' please don't fohgit to gib my lub to yoh Ma!"

"Say Peachy," said Rosie, entering the kitchen, "yoh does n't mind a ole jackass like I tellin' yoh somepin', does yoh?"

"Of course not, Miss Rosie," replied the mulatto, already thrice primed with the old darkey's strongest tea and tales of her present grandeur carefully embellished for Seventh Avenue circles.

"Don't neveh tell de nobility de troof. Dey ain't used to et; an' dey does n't like et! Make 'em laff, ur—fool 'em! Dey wants de cream, an' yoh can have de milk! Dey is n't got no time fur thinkin' an' worryin'. Dey pays uddeh folks to do dat fur em! Umph!

"Le' 's have some moh tea. Elegant, ain't et? Somebody brung et fum Chinee fur de young masteh. Cost a *lot,* he said: an' we 's got to be sparin' wid et. Does n't yoh want to take some to yoh Ma? Heah 's a cupful. Dat 'll last 'er a

week. Now, I 'll jes' fill dat nice little bag wid sugah, an' yoh can gib 'em bof to 'er wid my lub!

"Tell yoh whut 't is, Peachy, tea-drinkin' 's mighty tryin', bless Gawd, when de pot o' leaves don't draw no moh an' gits flat like ole Miss Burnses bustle!"

Rosie's reminiscent mood made her wakeful, after Peachy had gone, and caused her to forego her usual after-dinner nap. Thornton was, therefore, surprised to see her putting her kitchen in order as he came up the steps on the way to his room.

"Good-night, Rosie," he called. "Peachy is excellent."

"Dat good-fur-nothin' sassy niggeh?" snapped Rosie. "Whut made 'er chip in fur Gawd's sake? An' me not gittin' a wohd in edgeways wid Misteh Dick. She 's jes' like 'er Ma! De wench! I knowed 'er jes' afteh de wah down in Washin'ton."

Encouraged by Thornton's apparent interest as he loitered good-naturedly in the doorway, Rosie was glad to continue: "In dem days, niggehs went fum doh to doh to hire when deir

mastehs couldn't keep 'em no moh. So Mandy come ringin' de bell at Jedge Milleh's; an' de butleh brung 'er into de sewin'-room whur I wuz wid de madam a-makin' de nex' baby's clo'es.

"'Whut can yoh do?' de madam axed.

"'Dunno,' says Mandy.

"'Can yoh cook?'

"'No, mam!'

"'Can yoh wait on de table?'

"'No, mam!'

"'Can yoh make beds an' sweep?'

"'No, mam!'

"'Can yoh wash an' iron?'

"'No, mam!'

"'Can yoh sew?'

"'No, mam!'

"'Den whut did yoh do, fur Gawd's sake, on de plantation?'

"'Oh, I jes' kep' de flies off o' ole miss'!' says Mandy.

"De madam knowed 'er people an' wuz sorry fur de poh gal: so she tuk 'er in to learn 'er. She might jes' as well 'a' tried et wid de cat: fur Mandy wuz out an' all oveh de town."

"What do you mean?" asked Thornton.

"I mean, she got to behavin' like a reg'lah New Yohkeh. Dat disencouraged de madam. She tole de gal to go git married, fur she wa' n't fit fur nothin' else."

"Did she discharge her?"

"Oh, no. Miss Milleh wuz a kind lady. De idee wuz 'nough fur Mandy: fur she wuz powe'-ful cute in sech mattehs. She soon landed a yalleh-niggeh whut wuz a sight betteh an' her, bless Gawd, an' discha'ged huhself to hitch up to him. Now *her* gal, Peachy, 's jes' like de Ma! I would n't trust 'er no furder 'an yoh could sling a bull by de tail!"

"Do you suppose she walked off with anything?"

"Huh!" ejaculated Rosie, startled into an upright position. "Oh, Misteh Tho'nton, chile! Peachy would n't take nothin' o' *ourn whut we did n't gib 'er!*"

"Do you know how to make an old-fashioned strawberry short-cake?" inquired Thornton abruptly.

"Well, I reckon I does n't know how to make

no uddeh kind o' nothin'," said Rosie with an infinite sense of relief.

"How do you do it?"

Rosie looked vexed. She cooked only by intuition, not by rule.

"Listen to this," said Thornton, taking a letter from his pocket, and remaining quite undisturbed by the cook's angry scowls.

"Heah, heah, now! Don't jump in a feveh! Wait till I gits time to tell yoh!"

"Let me tell you the New England way," said Thornton, who proceeded to read aloud.

"Dat ain't de way!" exclaimed Rosie peevishly.

"Yes, it is. I know how to cook!"

"O' co'se yoh does! Yoh 's a *man;* an' yoh can do eberything but tuhn yohself wrong side out! De creatures! Yoh 's jes' like Misteh Jinkinses second wife. She wuz a ole maid; an' when she come a-prancin' in wid 'er new laws, she r'ared mos' out o' de top o' de house."

CHAPTER IV.

ROSIE MEETS OLD FRIENDS.

"Yes, et 's ben my grand day," she said thoughtfully, ignoring the incident of the strawberry short-cake. "I 's suhtainly got bawned oveh ag'in, an' I desehves et: fur I is n't neveh missed mass—when de weddeh wuz fine; an' I 's tole my beads reg'lah; an' I is n't neveh lied—fur et ain't no lie when et 's wuss to tell de troof. De Lawd is indeed good to 'is desehvin' chillun."

CHAPTER IV.

ROSIE MEETS OLD FRIENDS.

"Say, Peachy," observed Rosie at a tea-confab which delayed Thursday's dinner half an hour, "did yoh know I 's goin' to school?"

"You, Miss Rosie?"

"Uh—huh! Cookin' school! D' yoh see dat big book on de shelf? Et tells yoh how to do ebery-thing 'ceptin' gittin' to Hebben. I 's mos' tuhned white tryin' to undehstan' de young masteh read et, an' I suhtainly is woh out one paih o' shoes runnin' to Emmeline Jones afteh mass to fine out whut 'e means. He knows so much, I tole 'im 'e could cook de dinneh, an' I 'd set by Miss Jinny's side."

"What did he say to that?"

"Mos' cracked 'is sides a-laffin'! Does yoh think I 'd say et ef 'e did n't? Uh—uh! Guess not! When dey gits mad, make 'em laff: yoh can do whut yoh likes wid 'em den. Umph!"

"Oh, you know how to manage the men, Miss Rosie."

" 'Deed I does! Gawd bless 'em!"

"I wonder you never married again? Did n't you want to?"

"My Lawd, Peachy, how yoh talks! Co'se I did. Dey neveh wuz n't but one kind ob a woman whut did n't want to git married all de time."

"What kind was that?"

"A dead woman," chuckled Rosie. "But Land-street wuz sech a pill, anuddeh like 'im 'u'd 'a' killed me, shuh! So I 's done gone let et kill some uddeh fool instid: an' heah I is enjoyin' life an' dis elegant Chinee tea! Whua! Whua! Whua! Whua!"

"As I wuz sayin', Peachy, de young masteh would n't 'a' woh out 'is pants settin' in de ketchen readin' wid de big book ef little Miss Jinny wuz n't comin' to-night. He did n't waste no time on dem ole birds whut wuz heah Sunday. Uh—uh! Guess not! We 's goin' to have things grand to-night. All de stuff 's fixed 'ceptin' de strawberry sho't-cake. I 'll bake dat befoh dey 's ready: an' don't yoh fohgit to whispeh in Miss Jinny's eah dat Rosie made it special fur

her. De deah chile! I 's goin' down wid de coffee in my bes' bandaner, to see 'er an' Miss Annie. Now who 's a-ringin' de bell like dat, fur Gawd's sake, to sp'ile ouh tea? Come back when yoh 's foun' out, Peachy."

"It 's Mrs. Bancker," said Peachy returning to the kitchen. "She 's gone downstairs."

"Whut made 'er come so early, fur Gawd's sake? She suhtainly mus' be hongry! Well, I 's goin' to finish my tea befoh I does nothin' moh. Et 'll gib 'em time to git 'quainted."

"It 's eight o'clock already, Miss Rosie."

"My Lawd, whut ails dat bell? Dem folks suhtainly is n't got nothin' to eat at home. 'T ain't Miss Annie, I know; fur she always wuz late, 'er Pa said. Run open de doh, Peachy, an' keep 'em busy till I mixes de soup."

Rosie's dinner added glory to the best Southern traditions, if dessert did follow a half-hour's intermission. Peachy had rapped thrice on the dumb-waiter and had been forcibly put out and locked out of the kitchen before Thornton rose in exasperation and started in quest of the strawberry short-cake.

"Let me in at once!" he demanded, vigorously

shaking the door until Rosie ungraciously complied.

"*Where* is the strawberry short-cake?"

"Et 's done!" pouted Rosie, displaying a suspicious anxiety to conceal the range. "Et 's on de dumb-waiteh! Et 'll be down befoh yoh is!"

"I propose to wait here until I see it started down." With a quick movement he stepped to one side. "Rosie! How *dare* you!" he cried, levelling his finger at a metal hand-basin pyramided high with luscious strawberries on the back of the range.

"Well! Et 's all yoh fault!" she responded feelingly. "Et 's all yoh fault! Yoh neveh would n't 'a' knowed et ef yoh 'd kep' out!"

"The hand-basin!" gasped Thornton. "The hand-basin!"

"Now look y' heah, chile! Et 's *bran'-new!*" said Rosie, telling the most plausible lie. Nobody ain't neveh had deir hands in et! I bought et fum Miss Lynch dis mawnin' an' paid 'er fifteen cents fur et."

"Of course you did, Rosie!" cried a sweet young voice, as Dick Wynne's familiar laugh pealed through the corridor.

"Et 's Miss Jinny!" exclaimed the old mammy, dropping the corners of her out-spread apron. "Et 's Miss Jinny!" she repeated with emotion at the sight of a winsome face in the doorway. "Lawd bless de sweet chile!"

"And bless you, Rosie," said the young woman, impulsively placing a beautifully rounded arm about the old slave's neck, "you knew my dear mother."

"Yes, my dahlin', befoh she got bawned."

"Leave us!" Miss Melrose dismissed the young men with an imperious gesture. "I shall help Rosie with the short-cake," she called after them. "Be patient as long as I choose to stay."

"Oh, Miss Jinny," cried Rosie with delight, "yoh 's jes' like Gin'ral Warrin'ton, yoh gran'-pa, when 'e made de niggehs walk Spanish! Dat suhtainly was a sight!"

"Here is Auntie," said Miss Melrose, as a stately dame appeared beyond the threshold.

"Miss Annie!" was all Rosie could murmur, when Mrs. Melrose placed one arm about her neck and affectionately stroked the wrinkled black cheek. "Miss Annie! Miss Annie!"

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"I 'd a heap ruddeh be j'ined up wid my own folks heah dan in Hebben whur all de men an' women dresses de same," remarked Rosie to Peachy over the usual good-night draughts of tea. " 'T ain't no sight to see de ladies in *deir* night-gowns, but I guess I 'd bust out a-laffin', shuh, to see de great Gin'ral Warrin'ton widout 'is grand apple-ettes a-settin' in 'is night-shirt a-playin' a harp, an' ole Uncle Lije a-standin' behind 'im in is short one jes' like 'e did at de table, only 'e had 'is pants on dere, a-showin' 'is fat legs whut Aunt Celie said wuz like de ones on de big pianner in de pahlah, dey wuz so crooked an' full o' fat places. Whua! Whua! Whua! Whua! De Gin'ral would cuss, shuh! 'Cause 'e 'd know whut a call-down et 'u'd be fur 'im widout 'is unifo'm an' dem grand apple-ettes!

"Uh—uh, Peachy; I 's got my hands full heah wid goin' to de great queen down de street tomorrow, an' to Miss Annie an' Miss Jinny on Saturday."

"I say, Rosie," said Dick Wynne looking in at the door, "you must keep an engagement book.

You can't get on in Society without it. I 'll send you one."

"Oh, thank yoh, Misteh Dick! Yoh 's jes' like yoh Ma!"

"Good-night!" cried Dick.

"Good-night, dahlin'. Say yoh prayers good, ur I 'll tell Miss Lizzie, yoh Ma!"

Peachy, with her basket of delicacies from the feast, had barely time to vanish by way of the back elevator before Thornton, who followed closely after Dick, stopped to praise Rosie for her excellent dinner.

"Yes, et 's ben my grand day!" she said thoughtfully, ignoring the incident of the strawberry short-cake. I 's suhtainly got bawned oveh ag'in, an' I desehves et: fur I is n't neveh missed mass—when de weddeh wuz fine; an' I 's tole my beads reg'lah; an I is n't neveh lied—fur et ain't no lie when et 's wuss to tell de troof. De Lawd is indeed good to 'is desehvin' chillun!"

"Reg!" called Dick from his room. "Did you tell Rosie about Peachy?"

"Peachy!" ejaculated Rosie indignantly.

"Peachy! Whut 's dat lyin', or'nary niggeh disgraced us wid now, fur Gawd's sake?"

"When she helped Mrs. Bancker off with her wrap," laughed Thornton, "and saw her bare neck and arms, she said, 'Oh, Madam, are n't you afraid you 'll take cold? Can't I get a shawl or something to throw over your shoulders?' "

"No; Peachy did n't say dat," said Rosie calmly. "Peachy did n't say dat."

"Yes, she did," said Thornton, nettled by the contradiction. "Mrs. Bancker told me as soon as she came down stairs, and was greatly amused by it."

"No! Peachy did n't say dat," persisted Rosie, shaking her head. "Oh, my Gawd!" she cried, in sudden despair. "Dat happened in *ouh* house? We can't hold ouh heads up now! We 's ruined! We 's disgraced! Me an' yoh can't go in Sassiety no moh! De nobility won't come to us no moh! My Gawd! Whut *is* we to do? Can't we publish 'er in de papehs? Sallie did dat wid Jones when 'e got so lazy an' spendin' 'er money on uddeh women. We is n't 'sponsible fur dat crazy niggeh Peachy, whut is n't neveh had no learnin'!"

Rosie's face lightened under a sudden inspiration. "Leastways, I is n't!" she added deprecatingly. "I did n't want 'er. You *cried* fur Peachy!"

"Well!" she ejaculated with a sigh of relief, 't ain't my buryin'! I 's goin' visitin' to-morrow. I 'll weah my new hat wid de big red poppies, an' my Sunday cawsets, and my pink gahtehs. Guess I will! Humph! Yoh don't ketch Roxana 'ludin' to dat low-lived, ignurunt niggeh, Peachy! Humph! An' I 's goin' to be wid Miss Jinny, Saturday! Is n't yoh jealous?"

"What nonsense, Rosie! Good-night!" and laughing immoderately, Thornton started down the corridor.

"Don't know 'bout dat!" observed Rosie, with a sly wink for her own delectation as she turned out the lights. "Yoh lady-bird 's done ben in de nest; an' ef yoh *is* deaf an' blind Roxana ain't! Uh—uh! She 'll take care ob yoh! Miss Jinny's a-prayin' fur yoh dis minute, deah chile, an' 'er heart 's a-singin', 'Good-night! Good-night!'"

CHAPTER V.

ROSIE SITS FOR A PORTRAIT.

"Well," mused Rosie over her bed-time cup of tea, "et would indeed s'prise de cullud popelation to see me settin' in a gold frame wid all my beautiful clo'es on me jes' like de white royalties. Et suhtainly would. Yes, et suhtainly would. Et would be a grand slap at dat stuck-up black trash whut done p'inted deir fingehs afteh me, when I wuz savin' fur de ondertaker-man, a-sayin': 'Poh ole niggeh! De Lawd's done fohgot 'er, an' de Debbil don't want 'er.'"

CHAPTER V.

ROSIE SITS FOR A PORTRAIT.

The story of Rosie's new-found friends quickly permeated the various social strata of the coloured districts.

Whereupon it transpired, each afternoon, that squads of black ladies, young and old, were landed by the creaking back elevator at her kitchen door; and as they flushed their thirsty throats with "elegant Chinee tea," Rosie descanted, in a stentorian baritone, upon her re-entry into "Sassiety." Then, with a free-handed philanthropy befitting her new affluence, she would take from an upper shelf a pile of assorted paper bags which she had collected for the purpose, and bestow upon each dusky friend a portion of sugar, dried fruit, tea or coffee.

Thrifty Miss Driscoll, the little flower-painter who lived on the studio-floor above the apart-

ment, was daily witness of Rosie's prodigality. Not only could she hear, but see the old mammy and her human parasites. Late one afternoon, she espied the turbaned head at the kitchen-window and called "Good-evening."

"Huh!" ejaculated the old darkey, with a startled look over her shoulder.

"Look up!" called Miss Driscoll.

Rosie fumbled for her spectacles and adjusted them for sky-gazing.

"Law me, Miss, whut a pretty picture yoh makes!"

"So do you."

"Me? An' ole niggeh like I pretty! Whua! Whua! Whua! Whua! Guess yoh 's thinkin' 'bout yohself, Miss."

"No; in your bandana, in that window-frame, you would make a beautiful picture. I should like to paint you."

"Oh, no, Miss," said Rosie, with unmistakable disapproval, "I is n't neveh fooled wid nothin' whut de Lawd 's done did fur me. De white ladies does dat: an' Gawd knows 'isself 'e 's done made me black 'nough, too! I is n't neveh put on no paint."

"You don't understand me," explained Miss Driscoll. "I want to paint your picture."

"Like de white royalties?"

"Of course!"

Rosie sat down hard in her rocker, overweighted with a sense of her own importance. "My Lawd! My Lawd!" she gasped, blinking excitedly up at the studio window.

"Come up!" said Miss Driscoll. "We 'll talk it over now."

"Yes, Miss; thank yoh. I 'll jes' go take my bandaner off an' fix my hair."

"No, no!" cried the little artist. "Come just as you are. I 'll meet you at the head of the steps."

Upon entering the studio, Rosie exclaimed in delighted amazement: "Et looks fur all de wo'ld like a shootin'-gall'ry!"

Miss Driscoll's wan cheek flushed and she tightened her lips in painful embarrassment. "I am not a regular portrait-painter. These are some of my friends. Which one would you like to shoot at?"

"Oh, none ob 'em, Miss! Dey 's jes' grand!" cried Rosie, upon whom the significance of the

dialogue was utterly lost. "Which one ob 'em is yoh goin' to make me like? Dat one wid de big featheh hat an' de flowehs all oveh de dress? I 's got a lovely big hat, too, wid red roses all oveh et, whut Miss Jinny Melrose gib me afoh she went to Newpoht, an' a grand satin dress wid Johnny-jump-ups all oveh et, whut de great queen down de street in de big brown palace gib me when I wuz to et myself to call on 'er afoh she went to Paris. I 'll jes' run down an' slip 'em on an' be back afoh yoh can tuhn 'round."

"Do that to-morrow," called Miss Driscoll, running after her, "I can see beautiful hats and gowns in the street any day; but I never before met a really lovable southern coloured lady like yourself."

"Oh, Miss," murmured Rosie, modestly, "yoh talks jes' like a Southe'neh yohself."

"I don't wonder that Mr. Thornton is so fond of you," continued Miss Driscoll.

At mention of her employer, Rosie's genial expression changed instantly to one of suspicion; but the flattery in an invitation to be painted was irresistible, and she soon found herself posed on

a movable platform at one end of the room, with the artist flitting about her for the best points of view.

Once she caught Rosie by the chin to change the position of her head.

"Whua! Whua! Whua! Whua!" roared the old mammy, bending double over her knees. "Guess et tickles like, a-settin' here tryin' to make my ole black self look pretty."

"That 's right," said Miss Driscoll, arranging another pose. "Just look natural."

"Guess a niggeh can't look no uddeh way," screamed Rosie again. "Whua! Whua! Whua! Whua!"

Miss Driscoll's laughter soared bird-like above the full-toned African guffaw. "Why Rosie," she gasped at last, "we 'll have a portrait for the fall exhibition that will make us both famous."

"Well, ef yoh can't do nothin' else wid et, dey 'll take me to fire at—at de shootin'-gall'ry, shuh! Whua! Whua! Whua! Whua!"

As Miss Driscoll was not so confident of her own artistic powers that she could fully appreciate the suggestion, she proceeded diplomatically, and not without difficulty, to exact a promise

from Rosie to appear in a kitchen dress and her bandana, the following morning, for her first sitting.

With an envious sigh, the aged darkey gave one last, long look at the lady in the Gainsborough hat and brocaded gown on the easel, and shuffled heavily back to her kitchen, muttering: "A bandaner! A *cotton bandaner!* She is n't got no taste! I 's paid de ondertaker-man, I guess! I is n't got to weah my ole bumbazine bunnet no moh, neetheh. Guess not!"

Disappointed at losing an opportunity to display her gorgeous raiment, Rosie pondered long over the lack of taste in dress evidenced by Miss Driscoll, and nursed her wounded pride until she had distorted the whole incident of their acquaintance into a ruse of the artist to meet Thornton and finally marry him.

"De poh dahlin'! De honey deah!" she groaned. "Et 's only de grace ob Gawd whut keeps 'im fum realizin' de dangeh heah in de hot weatheh fum de ole maids—de ole maid *hens!* Dey jes' buhns up wid lub fur yoh—when yoh does n't want 'em 't all. Oh, my Gawd! I 's got to have a swoller o' tea fur thinkin' ob 'em." Rosie

reached for the ever-ready teapot on the back of the range, and filled a cup with the coppery fluid; and as she cooled the steaming beverage with her breath, she continued her bitter soliloquy:

"Deir lub biles up an' wrinkles deir leatheh faces till dey looks like dried apples a-hangin' on de tree all winteh—so dey does—de scarecrows! Dey 's done hea'd o' Miss Jinny Melrose, an' et 's *jealousy*—de cats! Dat painteh-woman knows she 's in Newpoht, fur de Melroses is sech big bugs dey can't change deir shimmies widout all de papehs whut dey is a publishin' et afoh dey can git 'em washed an' ironed ag'in. Dat 's a fact; an' I is n't goin' up to 'er ole shootin'-gall'ry no moh! No, sir-ee; I is n't! 'Deed I is n't! She 's a turrer—a turrer! De idee o' dat dried-up, frizzled-up, disgustin' ole hag a-speakin' to me out o' de winder so free-like! Ef she wants to paint a niggeh, she can git dat grinnin' mule on de front elevateh to set on 'er box. *He* won't interduce dat nasty bird to de honey chile! Uh—uh! Guess not! No, Miss Cat; Roxana 's done wid yoh! Good-evenin'!"

She rose and dropped the window with a slam.

Little Miss Driscoll, dreaming of great achievements in the fading light, started nervously at the noise. "Yes, it is the best idea," she said, turning again to regard the platform where the quaint black mammy had capered and posed in her artistic visions, "if she will only consent to it."

"Well," mused Rosie over her bed-time cup of tea, "et would indeed s'prise de cullud popelation to see me settin' in a gold frame wid all my beautiful clo'es on me jes' like de white royalties. Et suhtainly would! Yes, et *suhtainly* would! Et would be a grand slap at dat stuck-up black trash whut done p'inted deir fingehs afteh me when I wuz savin' fur de ondertaker-man, a-sayin': 'Poh ole niggeh! De Lawd's done fohgot 'er, an' de Debbil don't want 'er!'

"Yes, suh! *Dat* would be my *jubilee!* An' ef de painteh-woman 'll paint me dat way an' gib 't to *me,* she can paint me *her* way—an' keep et! Yes, suh; she can keep et an' *set* on et, fur all I cares; fur I 's a-goin' to have my *jubilee*—my

jubilee! An' den the cullud trash in Seventh Avenue can go to de Debbil!"

Next morning, attired in an umbrella-hat of red cabbage-roses and a trailing gown of rich yellow satin brocaded in colours, Rosie swept proudly into the modest studio.

"Huh!" began the old darkey with faint screams of ecstasy as she presented all sides for admiration. "Huh! I 's jes' grand, is n't I? Huh! Now, please Gawd, I 's got somepin' to dress myself wid when I goes in Sassiety! Huh?"

"Is it not a trifle short in front?" ventured Miss Driscoll, in a spasmodic effort to control her levity.

"Not when I set!" rejoined Rosie, clambering stiffly on to the platform and planting herself on the chair with knees wide apart. "Can yoh see my stockin's now?"

"A little bit."

"Now?" inquired Rosie, bringing her knees together and tightening the gown over her stomach and lap.

"Only your slippers."

Rosie gave a startled look at her ragged foot-

gear from which a big bronzed toe protruded. "Humph!" she said. "Looks fur all de wo'ld like a tarrapin's head, don't it? Whua! Whua! Whua! Whua! Clean fohgot to put on my shoes dis mawnin'. Yoh does n't need to paint 'em nohow. Dat lady in de feathehs oveh dere on dem sticks is n't got none on. Leastways yoh can't see 'em. Does I look as—*good*—as her?"

"You are simply splendid!" replied Miss Driscoll. "But do you know, you are ever so much more picturesque in your bandana."

Rosie's face looked suddenly older; "Yas 'm, I suppose I is: only I does n't know whut dat wohd means. Tell yoh whut I 'll do, Miss," said the impulsive old creature, at once announcing her plan for the two portraits. "Now, dat 's satisfyin' to me ef et is to yoh. Huh?"

Miss Driscoll, though fully alive to the advantages of a free model, hesitated in order to compute the cost of an extra canvas.

"I 's got my reason," continued Rosie, "an' I 'spect yoh 's got yohs. Huh?"

"I 'll do it," replied the artist, "providing you will pose the way I want you for the picture I am

to keep. Do you remember coming into your kitchen about two o'clock a few nights ago?"

"I does dat ebery night to wash de dinneh dishes."

"The *dinner* dishes? At two o'clock in the morning?"

"Co'se! I goes to bed jes' as soon as I reds up de dinin'-room."

"Does n't the food on the dirty dishes draw the cockroaches?"

"Ugh! Dey 'd come anyway. My! Guess I an' de cockroaches is had lots o' fights! I jes' *slooshes* 'em! I *slooshes* 'em wid b'ilin' wateh! We 's got tin boxes fur eberything."

"I should think you would need them," observed Miss Driscoll. "Well—the other night it was too hot to sleep, and I was taking what fresh air there was at the window. You came into your kitchen carrying a candle; and as you walked near to the window, you shaded your eyes to look at the sky. I should like to paint you with the candle light on your face just as you looked at that moment."

"Whut? Widout any clo'es?"

"You wore your bandana, and had on a little

red flannel underwaist and a short blue flannel skirt."

"An' all my bare legs a-showin', too?"

"Why, Rosie, you don't know what a picture you made."

"Me!" said the old mammy, rising in wrath to her full stature. "*Me* strippin' stark-mother-naked as a bird to be painted! Miss! I 's ben respectable eveh sence de day when I got bawned. I is n't neveh ea'ned my bread in no dissipated way sence dat day: an' I 's had *plenty* o' chances, too! Oh! *I 's had plenty o' chances!*"

Gathering her precious silken skirts about her knees, Rosie laboriously descended the platform.

"I did n't see more of your legs the other night than I see at this minute," observed Miss Driscoll, unmoved by Rosie's rancour.

"Huh?" ejaculated the darkey, still tightly holding up her robes and extending one leg. "Well, dat ain't much," she drawled in a mollified voice as she raised her eyes to the feather-crowned lady on the easel. "De wind h'ists 'em higher dan dat in de streets when et 's blowin'; an' nobody don't faint, neetheh."

"And as for your neck and shoulders, Rosie, any woman might be proud of them."

"Well—I guess dat 's so!" said Rosie, releasing her skirts. "Dey is n't no niggehs comin' to dis shoot—dis gall'ry nohow, an' ef I wuz painted stark-mother-naked as a bird, dey would n't know et! Well, I does n't care ef yoh does n't. I wants myself painted in dese clo'es *fust,* fur my *jubilee.*"

"Your jubilee?"

"Well—I is n't said nothin' 'bout et yit; but I 's goin' to have one wid my new picture—an' a gold frame, too; fur I does n't have to give de ondertaker-man no moh fur my buryin'. I 's jes' as good as dead an' buried now, Miss, in a decent respectable way—jes' as I 's lived—wid a cross oveh me. Tell yoh whut 't is, 't ain't many niggehs can say dat. De night-doctehs gits de mos' ob 'em when day dies. De buzzahds! Ugh!"

Miss Driscoll stopped Rosie's mournful reflections by posing her on the platform with instructions to talk as much as she liked in order to preserve her natural expression.

"Now, fur Gawd's sake, why does n't de men whut makes dem little pictures ob yoh on tin,

whut looks like de sides o' musta'd boxes, tell yoh dat. Why one day when Sallie stood all ob 'er husbands up in a row, I tole 'er dey looked so *solemn*—like she 'd done died fust an' left 'em widout no suppoht."

Just as Rosie terminated a lengthy exposition of Sallie's matrimonial methods, a terrifying clap of thunder precipitated a panic in the studio.

Miss Driscoll screamed, and the only material part of Rosie visible was a big black hand describing fantastic crosses before a collapsed heap of cabbage-roses and yellow brocaded satin.

"Whur is et now?" came an agonised whimper from under the gaudy pyramid. "Whur is et now?"

"The sky is blue!" said Miss Driscoll, glancing in wonderment up at the roof-light. "It must be off there," she continued, starting for the window. "Oh! It 's away in Jersey—miles from here. It 's as black as night on the other side of the river."

"Humph! Might 'a' knowed et!" exclaimed Rosie, complacently resuming her pose. "Dey has de turriblest, rippin'est sto'ms whut dey is out dere. Guess I know. Wuz in one ob 'em

oncet. 'T wuz when Sallie married—Humph! Now whut wuz dat debbil's name? Well! 'T wuz a man, anyway. He come afteh Jones whut wuz de wust ob 'em all."

"Yoh see, when de wah wuz, me an' Sallie lived in Washin'ton. Sallie wuz a widder den; fur—men 'ad run kind o' low-like. Dey wuz all in de army. Well! One day we went out to de ole home whur we got bawned in Maryland. Yoh see, when de young masteh whut owned us died, he left us ouh freedom: so me an' Sallie wuz free niggehs. Well, suh, will yoh b'lieve et, de blackest niggeh de Debbil eveh made conjured Sallie out dere. An' dat wuz—Jones! Yes, suh, dat wuz de fust time she seen 'im. Well—Sallie went clean crazy 'bout 'im. Dey wuz n't no doin' nothin' wid 'er. She had a stockin' full o' money, an' said she wuz goin' to *buy* 'im: fur, yoh see, folks 'lowed de South 'u'd lose in de wah, an' de price o' niggehs 'ad done went *'way* down. So Sallie went wid 'er ha'd-ea'ned money nex' mawnin', an' bought Jones fum 'is masteh fur a hund'ed-an'-fifty dollahs. Yes, Miss, she paid a hund'ed-an'-fifty dollahs fur dat wuthless, low-lived, or'nary leavin's o' black trash! Den she

walked to town *huhself* an' bought a pair o' marriage licenses, an' dat very night dey wuz hitched up. Huh! An' Miss, Sallie ain't neveh done repentin' et, an' she 's always a-sayin' to me, 'Ef I only had dat money back whut I paid fur dat black African niggeh!' Yoh see, he was a moon-chile!"

"A what?"

"A moon-chile. Dey 's de viledest whut dey is. Dey 's so bad de ole Debbil goes an' hides 'is head ebery time de moon changes an' dey 's doin' all deir cussedness, 'cause 'e 's so 'shamed 'e made 'em. When de moon shines bright dey 's like little kittens; but, in de dahk o' de moon! Umph!"

"De home folks done tole Sallie 'e wuz a moon-chile: but 'e conjured 'er, an' den she done act wuss 'an any moon-chile huhself tell she got 'im. An' den! My Gawd! My Gawd! Dey wuz n't no keepin' 'im out o' jail in de city, an' she jes' had to go No'th wid 'im when de wah wuz n't no moh.

"She foun' a little house down in Jersey wid a gahden a-backin' down into a little crick, whut

wuz n't biggeh 'an no ditch; an' whut run frew de graveyahd jes' afoh et got to de gahden.

"Dey wuz a niggeh passon whut lived de uddeh side o' de crick; an' oncet in de dahk o' de moon, he got sorry fur Sallie an' tuk Jones off to de meetin'-house, whur dey wuz all crazy wid a revival, a-tryin' to learn 'im r'ligion. An' will yoh b'lieve et, dat debbil Jones went home wid one o' de sistern whut done got r'ligion an' shout huhself hoa'se dat night. De boys whut done seen 'm go out wid 'er knowed 'e 'd be goin' home befoh mawnin' an' thought dey 'd cure 'im; so dey wraps up in sheets an' table-cloths, an' sets on de stone wall o' de graveyahd a-waitin' fur 'im. Jes' as dey wuz a little, teenty-weenty bit o' light 'way down low whur de sun comes up, dey hea'd Jones a-comin' down street: so dey jumps up an' begins to run roun' on deir tiptoes like dey wuz flyin'. Some wuz on de wall, an' some in de graveyahd; an' some ob 'em run all roun' 'im jes' like dead folks.

"Well, Miss, ef dat 'ad ben de light o' de moon Jones 'u'd done ben skeered to death; but et wa'n't, et wuz *his* time an' *dahk*. So 'e jes' walks 'long, a-stoppin' to look at 'em impident-like, oncet in a

while, tell 'e gits to de end o' de wall. By dat time de white creatures wuz all 'roun' 'im. So Jones takes off 'is hat an' says—'Good-mawnin', I hopes yoh 's well? I—does n't want to be pryin' an' onpolite-like, but—does yoh mind tellin' me—air yoh jes' out fur a walk, ur is dis de Day o' Gin'ral Ris'riction?'

"Well, Miss, dat very day Jones got up an' died. He wuz foolin' wid a gun, an' de grace o' Gawd tuhned et 'roun' an' blowed a hole clean frew 'im.

"My! Wuz n't dey rejoicin'! Sallie baked 'nough fur a weddin'; an' one o' de men whut wuz settin' up wid Jones, popped de question to 'er dat very night, fur 'e knowed she felt like havin' a festibel a-gittin' rid o' dat wicked black debbil.

"Sallie married 'im fouh weeks lateh to de day, an' I come up fum Washin'ton fur de weddin'. Uh! Wuz n't dat a time! Uh! Yoh neveh done hea'd sech a *shivveree* in all yoh life. Et wuz jes' like 'lecshun night. Dey brung ho'ns like mockin'-birds, an' ho'ns like jackasses, an' ebery uddeh kind o' ho'n whut comes between; an' dey pounded on wash-b'ilers an' pans an' kittles;

an' dey tolled big bells an' shuk little ones—an' rattles, too. Whew! De noise wuz somepin' turrible. An' den, widout nobody 'spectin' et, de sto'm bust oveh 'em in tubs an' bucketfuls—jes' like de wrath o' Gawd wuz givin' 'em de debbil fur so much cussedness.

"Et pohed an' et pohed all de night; an' den de folks said a cloud bust somewhur up de crick, an' de wateh come down like a house a-sweepin' de whole valley befoh et; an' when de stone culbert in de graveyahd would n't hold no moh, de flood went frew de made ground, whut wuz low, jes' like a sponge, an' riz up all de folks whut wuz buried dere an' sent 'em sailin' off to de ribber jes' like et wuz sorry fur 'em layin' dere so long widout nothin' to do.

"Well, some folkses habits is powe'ful holdin' —when yoh 's dead, too; fur, who should be settin' up ag'in a apple tree in de gahden nex' mawnin'—jes' like 'e 'd come home drunk de night befoh to 'tend de weddin' an' wuz sleepin' et off—but Jones. Yes, Miss, et 's Gawd's own troof, et wuz Jones; an' 'is coffin wa' n't nowhur. Well! By de time Sallie 'd done buyed 'im anuddeh, she swoh she 'd leave de mos' costivest

niggeh whut neveh wuz befoh to fight et out wid de State o' Jersey. So de new husband he dug a hole like a well fur Jones, an' den him an' Sallie skipped widout leavin' no address. An' bless Gawd, she ain't ben in Washin'ton sence, 'cause she 's got to cross Jersey to git dere, an' she ain't willin' to take no moh chances wid Jones a-bobbin' up. Dat 's why I 's come heah to live: 'cause her an' Hallud is all de fambly I 's got left.

"Whew!" ejaculated Rosie, who had ended her narrative with anxious glances at the lowering sky beyond the roof, just as the artist had laid down her palette and brush. "When I drapped dat piece o' ole sof' peach on de floh dis mawnin' at breakfus', I said et would rain, shuh! An de sky wuz all blue, too. I 'll jes' slip down an' shet dem shetters, fur et blows wid awful rips frew ouh place."

CHAPTER VI.

ROSIE ATTEMPTS A PARABLE.

"Thank you, Hallud. Et 's mighty kind o' yoh tellin' me 'bout dem parables; dey 's nice to know anyway; fur conve'sation runs powe'ful low sometimes an' dey 'd fit in grand when yoh 's done tole all yoh antidotes."

CHAPTER VI.

ROSIE ATTEMPTS A PARABLE.

One Friday morning in August, the completed portrait of Rosie à la Gainsborough was reposing, unframed, on an easel where Rosie, standing in scant attire on the platform, could admire and worship her splendid pictured self.

"Yoh 's grand, Roxana, yoh suhtainly is; yoh 's grand," she mused, as Miss Driscoll worked, red-faced, over the final touches on the second of the two pictures before the open studio door. "An' when yoh gits yoh gold frame roun' yoh— By de way, Miss," she inquired, "when 's de man comin' wid et? His money 's jes' jumpin' like a shettle in my pocket."

A shadow fell athwart the threshold. Then Thornton stood there.

Almost swooning with modesty and appre-

hension, Rosie staggered toward a screen, and drew her gown on wrong side before. "I 's heah, honey; I 's comin'," she cried, tugging frantically at her waist as she heard him announce his name and inquire for her errant self. "Jes' run ahead, I 'll be down befoh yoh is. Now go 'long, chile. Go 'long. Whut yoh doin' dere, anyway? Huh?"

Peeping round an end of the screen, she discovered Thornton absorbed in contemplation of her latest portrait, and Miss Driscoll regarding him with dilating eyes. "My Gawd!" she gasped in terror. "She 's conjurin' 'im! She 's conjurin' 'im! Heah, dahlin', heah! Come wid me," she implored, bolting out half-dressed and pulling furtively at his coat sleeve. Roxana 'll go wid yoh. Come 'long, chile; come 'long. Whut 's de matteh? Huh? Does n't yoh want me?"

"Have you put a price on this picture?" calmly inquired Thornton of the artist, ignoring Rosie's strange behaviour.

"No," replied Miss Driscoll, evidently much flattered. "Rosie gave me the sittings for my own pleasure."

"She'll give you as many more as you like.

Would you accept a hundred dollars for this canvas?"

"Gladly, if Rosie is willing."

"I *is!* I *is!* Ef yoh 'll only come wid me, chile. Come on!" said Rosie, still grasping his coat. "Yoh train 'll go widout yoh. Et 's stahtin' now! Et 's done gone!"

"Poh Miss Jinny!" groaned Rosie despairingly and half to herself.

Thornton turned sharply.

"It 's the first time I 've ever known you to be in a hurry. It 's worth missing a train just to see you.'"

"Oh, he 's conjured!" murmured the old mammy, almost weeping. "He 's conjured! She 's done put a spell on 'im already."

"If it 's worth another hundred to paint me, I can give you some sittings when I return from Newport," said Thornton, turning his back on the irritating old mammy.

"In a petticoat, too? Huh?" interrupted Rosie, with all her usual asperity. "My Lawd, is dat smoke comin' out o' ouh flat? Fire! Fire! Fire!"

Rosie fled, followed by Thornton, who ran

through the flat and back to the kitchen by the time she arrived there calm and unperturbed.

"What are you up to?" he inquired, with a penetrating look, suspecting some roguery though not divining all.

"I guess somebody 's buhned deir coffee an' et 's done come up frew de co'ht."

"You 'll burn, if you tell whoppers like that," declared Thornton, turning away to pack his portmanteau.

"Well, ef I does," she retorted, "I 'll be shuh ob a place to keep dese ole bones o' mine wahm in winteh."

Rosie hovered over Thornton, fearful that the spell put on him by the maiden lady in the studio would cause him to defer his departure; and he, amused by the absurd situation created by the old darkey, hearkened leniently to her loud lamentations that she had no "Sally-Lunn" to send to "Miss Jinny" and that he had been very remiss in not telling her earlier of his intended visit to Newport.

"I could n't," replied Thornton, "Mr. Melrose wired me only this morning to come up for a few days."

"I guess dey wants him bad," observed Rosie, with a sigh of relief, watching Thornton's cab drive toward the station. "Dey suhtainly wants 'im bad! Well, dey *shall* have 'im. Dey *shall!*"

Ever since "Miss Jinny's" departure, Rosie had undergone a period of matrimonial apathy during which she had had ample opportunity to estimate her own power and independence in ruling over a bachelor's household. Though confident of a home for life in any event, her ultimatum had been for leaving well enough alone until ancient maidens and impetuous widows became "too pestiferous." Now she considered the time had come for prompt action, and so she packed a basket with delicacies and hurried up to Sixty-second Street to advise with Hallud, whose superior knowledge was attested to on a parchment conspicuously exhibited in a gaudy frame above Sallie's sewing-machine.

After an elaborated and dramatic enactment of the scene in the studio, Rosie added: "Now, mind yoh, Hallud, et 's only *her* whut needs correctin'. We 's got to make 'er take 'er spell off ouh young man, fur 'e does n't know et 's on 'im. Folks does n't know when dey 's conjured. 'Deed

dey does n't! Dey jes' does eberything whut yoh wants 'em to do widout yoh axin' et!

"Why dat poh chile done tuhned 'is pockets wrong side out; an' 'e 'd 'a' gib 'er de clo'es off 'is back ef I wuz n't ben dere to stop 'im. Yoh does n't know how crazy dey gits: an' dey stays dat way tell somepin' takes de spell off ob 'em. Now when de young masteh comes back et 'll be de same, only wuss, 'cause et 's hot weatheh an' dey is n't nothin' else to do.

"Say, Hallud, is n't yoh learned somepin' in dem books up to de Norman College 'bout stoppin' dem ole maids fum conjurin'?"

"No, cousin," replied the girl, shaking her head, "but I have in the Bible. Tell her a *parable.*"

"A *parable?* Whut 's dat?"

"A parable is a—well, it is n't the truth; but it 's an *awful* story you make up to tell people to scare them into doing right."

"Would n't dat be a lie?"

"Yes, if it were n't in the Bible."

"Co'se! Co'se!" exclaimed Rosie, blinking her eyes to emphasise her comprehension and approval of the idea.

"Thank you, Hallud. Et 's mighty kind o' yoh tellin' me 'bout dem parables; dey 's nice to know anyway, fur conve'sation runs powe'ful low sometimes, an' dey 'd fit in grand when yoh 's done tole all yoh antidotes. I 'll sleep wid et to-night, an' I guess I 'll scraggle out a parable in de mawnin' whut 'll s'prise 'er, an' not huht 'er feelin's neetheh, fur she 's a likely gal when dey is n't no men 'roun'."

Rosie sat disconsolate the following morning, depressed by a sleepless night, and silent with chagrin at her inability to construct the needful parable. Her ever-ready invention, the basis of her most potent charm, had failed her for the first time. She was fearful of having fallen a victim to Miss Driscoll's sorcery until cheered by the reflection that all of her best moments had sprung from inspiration, and that the good Lord would certainly support his deserving child at the right moment if she would only pluck up courage and boldly confront the artist in her studio.

Outside there was a scraping sound, a click, and the elevator-door swung open.

"Hallud! My Gawd!" screamed Rosie scram-

bling to her feet. "De good Lawd done sent yoh!"

"Poor cousin!" said Hallud, embracing her tenderly. "It 's been so hard on you all alone."

"Yes, I wuz lonely, Hallud."

"It must have been a terrible shock."

"Et wuz!" said Rosie in a whisper. "But how did yoh know 'bout et?"

"It was in the morning paper."

"De mawnin' papeh?" exclaimed Rosie in open-eyed amazement. "Why, how did dey know 'bout et?"

"Because the people here sent for an ambulance to take her to the hospital."

"Sent fur an ambelanche an' tuk 'er to de hospital!" said Rosie, a look of terror growing in her face.

"Who?" she whispered, pointing with awesome glance at the studio window. "Her?"

"Oh, no," said Hallud, "the janitor's wife. Did n't you hear it?"

"Heah whut, fur Gawd's sake?"

"Why, cousin, Mrs. Williams fell from that unoccupied apartment over there last night, nine stories, down the elevator-shaft.

When Rosie recovered her speech, she began to connect her reminiscences of the night with the appalling catastrophe in the adjoining apartment.

"I wuz layin' in dere in de dahk wid my eyes wide open a-tryin' to make up dat parable, when somepin' whut wuz n't nothin'—leastways not o' dis yarth—caught hole o' de sheet hard, jes' like dat, an' pulled ebery godly stitch off o' me onto de floh."

"I did n't say nothin'; I did n't do nothin'; I jes' got straight up,—*so*,—an' I walks out de doh an' down de hall widout lookin' behine me, or to de right or to de left, to de young masteh's room."

"I went in an' shet de doh an' locked 'er tight an' got into 'is bed—'cause 'e wuz n't in et."

"Well, I wuz layin' dere a-lookin' out de winder when somepin' come 'long de po'ch whut runs 'long back o' de house; an' et stud dere a-lookin' down into de co'ht. Et wuz her, Hallud!" whispered Rosie. "Et wuz her come back!"

"I coughed loud-like, an' et slipped 'way widout no noise; so, I gits up and shets de winder an' locks et, an' pulls de cuhtains down, an' I did n't see ur heah nothin' moh all de night; but, I

did n't sleep, Hallud, an' I could n't think no moh 'bout dat parable. Yoh see et wuz de Lawd's will, an' et wuz His hand whut done pull de sheet off me an' led me to de young masteh's room, so I could n't heah dat turrible cry in de elevateh-well.

"Et 's a bad-luck house, Hallud; a bad-luck house. Misteh Pritchard tole me so when 'e wuz heah las' Sunday: an' *he* knows 'cause 'e wuz bawn wid a caul. Dem folks knows shuh 'bout eberything 'ceptin' havin' luck fur deirselves.

"He wuz settin' whur yoh is now, an' 'e 'd tuhn 'is head an' kind o' listen-like widout sayin' nothin', an' yoh could n't 'a' hea'd a pin fall, too. Gawd knows whut de sperits wuz a-sayin' to 'im: but 'e suhtainly hea'd dat awful cry an' felt de spell o' dat conjurin' creature. *An' dey 's moh undeh dis roof somewhur!*"

The old negress drew her lips tightly together and rolled the whites of her eyes portentously. "A bad-luck house! A bad-luck house!" she sobbed.

"Come, now, Cousin; come home with me," exclaimed Hallud bravely; "your nerves are shat-

tered. You 'll be all right after a night at our house."

Always ready to adopt any idea whatsoever that justified her philosophy, Rosie locked up the apartment and departed joyfully, she and Hallud bearing between them a heavily laden basket of choice edibles.

Sunday morning, after early Mass, Rosie hastened home to empty the pan of drip-water under the ice-chest. Then she cut a large piece of cold red-ripe watermelon and ascended with this peace-offering to the studio.

"Et 'll cool yoh off, Miss," she explained, "fur et 's dangerous hot in de street."

"Really," added Miss Driscoll, after profuse thanks, "I feel almost as if I were robbing Mr. Thornton!"

"Oh, no, Miss; he 's always *tellin'* me to take things to ouh frens when dey can't come to us.

"Now dat 's a pretty good staht," reflected Rosie, elated by this first flash of her imagination; "I reckon dat parable won't need no coaxin' now."

"Rosie," exclaimed Miss Driscoll impulsively, and with tears shining in her eyes, "you don't

know it, but you are a perfect dear. You are my good angel."

The emotional old soul felt herself succumbing to the insidious allurement in this merited acknowledgment of her virtues, and staggered toward a chair with barely reason enough left to lock the middle and index fingers of each hand to protect herself from the conjurer's spell.

"I am going to tell you a secret," continued Miss Driscoll, a new tenderness in her voice. "I am engaged to a young artist; we are too poor to marry; but we will, if I make a success of the new portrait. It will establish my reputation, for Mr. Thornton is so well known everywhere."

"Is 'e?" said Rosie, more from curiosity than through lack of conviction.

"Of course. He 's the great cotillion leader in all the smart houses here and at Newport."

"My young masteh? My Lawd!" exclaimed Rosie, forgetfully unclasping her fingers in her genuine surprise. "I did n't know dat. Why we 's great big bugs, is n't we? Huh?"

"None bigger!"

"He 'll set in de Presi-*dent's* chair yit, Miss!

Shuh! An' den yoh can paint all de cabi-*net,* an' de jedges wid de big wigs. Uh—huh!"

"That will be some time off, Rosie."

"Co'se! Co'se! Yoh does n't want to wait fur dat. Co'se not! Tell yoh whut I 'll do, Miss," she added in a gush of sympathy, "I 'll speak to Misteh Dick, an' to Miss Jinny, an' Miss Annie, an' de queen huhself down de street whut gib me dat lovely satin dress; an' I knows dey 'll *all* want to be painted when dey sees me in my gold frame. Shuh! Shuh!" added Rosie with loving glances at the image of herself on the easel. "Ain't et neveh comin'?"

"To-morrow, if I have to go for it."

A heavy step without and a sharp ring of the bell drew Miss Driscoll to the door.

Left alone in meditation, Rosie chanced to notice her outspread fingers, and an awful thought abruptly stifled the tide of compassion welling higher and higher in her great heart: "Is I ben conjured? I wonder ef I *is* conjured? I wonder?"

"No," she mused with some comfort, "I is n't; fur folks does n't know et when dey is; an' I knows et. Leastways, don't matteh now, fur she

ain't tryin' to marry de honey chile nohow. Well, I guess all dat fuss 's ben some good: fur I 's learned 'bout dem parables what I did n't know befoh, an' dey comes in mighty handy in Sassiety."

"Yes," she overheard Miss Driscoll saying, "that is Mrs. Roxana Landstreet."

"Will you sign this?" said a special delivery postman coming forward.

"Suhtainly," she said, graciously accepting his pen. "Well—I is n't got my good specs on," stammered Rosie, unwilling to admit her inability to read or write. "I 'll jes' ask de Miss to do et fur me."

The postman had gone and Rosie stood irresolutely handling her letter, not knowing what to do with it.

"Oh, Rosie! Rosie!" cried Miss Driscoll gleefully. "Just listen."

"My Dear Miss Driscoll:

I departed in such haste yesterday that I had no time to liquidate my indebtedness to you. Therefore, I enclose my cheque for one hundred dollars,"—"And here it is!" exclaimed the artist, waving a bit of paper—"with the request that you

will kindly keep the canvas for me until my return.

I have written Rosie to come to Newport at once. Any advice you may be able to give her about the journey will be greatly appreciated by

Yours very sincerely,
REGINALD THORNTON."

"Newpoht?" gasped Rosie, offering her letter for perusal. "Newpoht? Me? Is I goin' to Newpoht? Whut does et say, Miss?"

The envelope was a thick one, containing a twenty-dollar bill and three separate missives. Miss Driscoll selected one and began:

"Dear Rosie:

We have just received the *Herald* telling of the terrible tragedy in our house. I fear it has been a great shock to you, so near our own doors, and I am unhappy at the thought of your being there alone at such a time. Therefore, I wish you to accept Miss Melrose's invitation to come to Newport for a few days, as I have decided to remain here until next week.

Give away anything perishable and stop the ice: and when you lock the apartment, give the key to the janitor. I have written him all further directions.

I have also written to my office, telling them

to buy your railway and Pullman ticket and send one of the boys with a cab to take you to the station and put you on the one o'clock train on Monday. He will call for you, with full instructions, at twelve o'clock. So have your bag ready —you can use one of mine—and don't keep him waiting. I enclose a bill for any necessary expenses.

Give the enclosed note to the Pullman car conductor, who will tell you where to change cars and how to find the Wickford boat for Newport. Miss Melrose will send someone to meet you upon your arrival. Now don't be depressed; but cheer up and you will have a lovely time here.

Faithfully yours,

REGINALD THORNTON.

P. S. Bring only quiet, unostentatious things to wear here. A black dress and another for a change will do, with your black hat which you usually wear. R. T."

"Now here is one," continued Miss Driscoll, "—from——"

"Miss Jinny!"

"Dear Rosie:

We are all so sorry to have you in New York all by yourself, at such a sad time, and Aunt Annie and I want you to come right over and stop

with us until Mr. Thornton is obliged to return home.

Don't bother about your clothes; we can find plenty for you here.

We shall expect you Monday.

Aunt Annie joins me in love.

Affectionately yours,

VIRGINIA MELROSE."

"Lawd lub 'er sweet soul! Dey wuz n't neveh nobody like dem Warrin'tons whut 's now Melroses. Why, when I tells 'em 'bout de ole times when Miss Annie wuz a gal, her an' Miss Jinny laffs tell deir cawsets mos' go. Whua! Whua! Whua! Whua! Oh, dey 's de *real royalties,* Miss. Dey lubs me *too* much! My Lawd! Won't I make fun fur 'em ut Newpoht! Whua! Whua! Whua! Whua!"

The evil spirits still hovering about the saddened homes flew rapidly away as Rosie's infectious laugh penetrated the inner court of the "bad-luck house."

CHAPTER VII.

ROSIE AT NEWPORT.

"De hedges heah is mos' beautiful," said Rosie, thinking to find a more congenial topic.

"They would be if so many rotten people did n't live behind 'em."

"Oh et 's always hahd to git decent help. De mos' ob 'em is sech dirty blackguards. Be careful, sonny; don't upset me."

"Don't fret. You 'll go to 'Eaven straight henough."

"Well, I hopes so; fur I should n't like to go to Hell an' have to meet all de Newpoht rascals oveh ag'in."

CHAPTER VII.

ROSIE AT NEWPORT.

All the smart world and a representation of less luminous bodies were out on wheels. Bellevue Avenue was at its best. The joy of living, like the bead on champagne, bubbled up in the soft sun-caressed air beyond verdant tree-tops and splendid villas and went soaring out over waters of sapphire blue, where palatial pleasure craft cut foaming ways to the confines of vision.

So Newport appeared as Rosie strolled leisurely along under a white silk sunshade once the property of "Miss Jinny," and gazed admiringly at the display of fashion in the open carriages.

Angry cries down a leafy side street, drew her attention to the occupants of a trim Victoria which stood at the garden entrance to a beautiful estate.

"You —— —— fool, can't you understand?" shouted a familiar voice.

Rosie joined the line of nurse maids and nursery governesses who were precipitately dragging their impressionable charges toward the scene of strife, where a semi-circle was speedily formed about the contestants.

"I think I might, Madam, if you did n't bewilder me by swearing at me each time," shouted a stalwart high-voiced footman in livery as he sprang angrily from the box. "I return you the emblems of my slavery." Peeling off his coat he hurled it to the pavement. "I have worn them long enough." His boots and cockaded hat came next.

"I wish you good-day, Madam!"

With a mocking flourish of his doe-skin breeches, he deposited them on the heap and strode majestically up the garden walk in his underclothes.

"Are n't you ashamed of yourselves, you snickering idiots. Take your children away," and the lady of the profane tongue stepped from the Victoria as the mob scattered suddenly. Only Rosie remained, rooted to the spot in utter amazement.

"De queen!" she gasped. Then seeing she

was noticed, she lowered her sunshade and strode forward. "Let me help you, Madam."

"Rosie!" exclaimed Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, evidently mollified by the sight of the faithful old darkey. "How do you happen to be here?"

"Me an' de young masteh is visitin' Miss Annie an' Miss Jinny."

Mrs. Hampton-Yorke ordered the horses put up and, gratefully acknowledging Rosie's offer to carry the discarded livery, walked with her across the lawn to the mansion.

"They blame Mrs. Hampton-Yorke for swearing," continued the great lady, her mind still angrily running after her rebellious footman; "how can she help it with such imbeciles about her."

" 'Deed, Madam, dat wuz de only way ole marse got any wohk done 't all; an' de slaves loved 'im, too."

"I fear it does n't affect the Irish that way."

" 'Deed et does n't, Madam! Nothin' but whisky does, fur dey 's de mos' aggravatin' debbils whut is."

Mrs. Hampton-Yorke laughed aloud, and after

stopping to give some orders to the butler, invited Rosie to her boudoir.

"You are a perfect godsend," she declared, sinking into an easy chair. "I reached home only two days ago, and things have gone wrong ever since. I must not talk about it. Tell me the gossip."

" 'Deed, Madam, I 's 'fraid I does n't know much; fur I does n't 'sociate wid de suhvants. I does n't want all dem low-lived furrin white men a makin' love to me. I had 'nough o' dat in Paris wid Miss Mary. Dey 's turrers, dey *is,* Madam, turrers! So I sets mos' de time wid Miss Annie on de tur-rass, an' wid Miss Jinny too, when her an' de young masteh is n't a-walkin' down by de wateh wid deir heads togeddeh."

"Is that a match, Rosie?"

"No, Madam, I does n't think so *yit;* but ebery time one o' dem great waves comes a-roarin' an' a-splashin' up ag'inst dem rocks, et kind o' *helps things on.* I does n't know why 't is, but de sight o' wateh puts queer notions into folkses heads in de summeh-time. 'Deed et does! Happened to me oncet: an' dat wuz how I come to git married, ef de good Lawd 'll eveh fohgive me

fur bein' sech a fool. I guess I won't say nothin' moh 'bout dat, Madam, I tries to fohgit et.

"Oh, thank yoh, Miss. Thank yoh!" said Rosie, graciously accepting a cup of tea after the French maid had served Mrs. Hampton-Yorke. Fortified by her staple beverage, she continued, though interrupted at frequent intervals by the hearty laughter of her hostess.

"I wuz a-sewin' oncet down on de James Ribber. Dey wuz a powe'ful 'mount o' co'htin' goin' on dat summeh: fur de niggeh qua'tehs wuz—a—'long de ribber whur de moon wuz shiny-like on de wateh an' come streamin' frew de cabin dohs.

"Well! Dey wuz a young feller, Lije, an' 'e wuz a-keepin' company wid Tilly Brown an' Lindy Parks to de same time, an' all de white folks knowed et. So one mawnin', Lije went up to de big house, 'cause 'e knowed de masteh whut 'e wohked fur wuz goin' to town: an' 'e give 'im a dollah an' fifty cents to git a pair o' marriage licenses fur him an' Lindy Parks.

"De masteh wuz 'way all day, an' when 'e come drivin' home 't wuz mos' dahk: but dere set Lije at de big gate waitin' fur 'im kind o'

anxious-like. So de masteh pulled a big white papeh out o' 'is pocket an' said: 'Here 't is Lije. Now run 'long an' marry Tilly.'

"'Foh Gawd, Marse,' said Lije, 'it ain't Tilly! Et 's Lindy whut I 's goin' to marry.'

"'Lindy?' said de masteh. 'Why, I thought *Tilly* wuz yoh keep-company.'

"'Dat 's so, Marse, she 's one ob 'em: but I 's goin' to marry Lindy.'

"'Well,' said de masteh, 'I thought et wuz Tilly an' had de papeh made out fur 'er.'

"'Ef yoh does n't mind, Marse,' said Lije, 'jes' have 'em changed fur Lindy de nex' time yoh 's in town.'

"'Dat 'll cost yoh 'nuddeh dollah an' fifty cents,' said de masteh.

"Lije scratched 'is foot ag'in 'is uddeh leg a minute to think; an' den 'e said: 'Well, Marse, I does n't b'lieve dey 's a niggeh livin' on de face o' Gawd's yarth to-day whut 's wuth anuddeh dollah an' fifty cents: so I 'll jes' keep dis pair o' marriage licenses an' marry Tilly.'

"An' Madam, will yoh b'lieve et? He *did!* Well—when dey got tired o' each uddeh, dey tuk up wid r'ligion. All de same, Lije got mad when

Tilly made too free wid de passon: an' Tilly slep' a 'hole week 'lone wid de dried onions in de garret when she caught Lije a-huggin' Lindy one evenin' behine de meetin'-house.

"Yoh see, de passon done marry hisself to Lindy. Now dey *wuz* folks whut knowed 'e had anuddeh wife an' fambly all growed up oveh in Albemarle County: but dey 'd done sent 'im dere 'lone to preach de gospel, an', o' co'se, 'e did n't want to bring no bad example befoh de congregation, so 'e jes' jumps in an' marries Lindy widout sayin' nothin' 'bout de uddeh fambly.

"Now, Lije did n't want to have no ha'd feelin's wid de passon, o' co'se, on 'count o' Lindy. Yoh see, dey 'd done made 'im oveh-see-uh on de place 'cause 'e wuz so stingy, an' called 'im, Uncle Lije an' her, Aunt Tilly. So, ebery Saturday night, Uncle Lije 'd say to de passon: 'Somepin' de matteh wid de big hen-house key. Won't lock! I hopes no or'nary low-lived niggeh won't fine 't out an' lif' ole marse's checkens to-night.' Den when folks wuz in bed, de passon 'u'd go creepin' down de fence to de hen-house an' steal two o' de fattest an' sweetest ones dere.

"Nex' mawnin' 'foh de white folks wuz up, de

passon would slip 'roun' to Aunt Tilly an' gib 'er one ob 'em an' tell 'er 'e done raise et hisself.

"Den Uncle Lije 'd go huntin' fur weasel holes in de hen-house floh, an' when 'e could n't fine none, he 'd scratch 'is head an' say 'e guess de weasel 's done crope frew a crack an' carried off 'is checkens.

"Dey wuz turrible toughs, dem two, ef dey could shout loudeh dan all de uddeh niggehs in de county.

" 'Deed, Madam," said Rosie, who suddenly realised that she was talking very loud and fast, "I 's 'fraid I 's makin' yoh tired."

"On the contrary, you are the best tonic I know. Tell me, how are you enjoying your visit at the Villa Melrose?"

"Jes' grand, Madam! Jes' grand! Why dey speaks to yoh at any time. Guess dey is n't much like de folks whut Miss Jinny's grandpa, Gin'ral Warrin'ton, went to stay wid up in Pennsylvania. Humph! I guess not. I hea'd 'im tell ole miss 'bout et when de two twins wuz n't no higheh 'an dat.

"Yoh see, de Gin'ral went up dere to make a speech like; an' de great man o' de place, whut

owned all de coal in de state an' wuz richer 'an any ole dog, invited 'im to stay wid 'im.

"Well—de Gin'ral said de man's fambly wuz jes' too lovely to 'im, an' 'e had a beautiful time until 'e went to bed. So de nex' mawnin', 'e got up feelin' jes' grand an' wishin' 'e could take all dem lovely folks home wid 'im to keep 'em dere: an' 'e goes down to breakfus'.

"Dey wuz n't nobody 'roun', so 'e sets 'isself in de hall whut wuz big as any chu'ch, an' waited.

"By-um-by, de madam she comes down de big steps.

"De Gin'ral puts 'is hand out in 'is grand way, like any presi-*dent,* an' bows low, an' says 'Good-mawnin', I hopes yoh 's slep' well?'

"De madam bends 'er head cold-like, widout lookin' an' widout takin' 'is hand ur widout speakin', an' walks straight past 'im into a doh.

"De Gin'ral wuz cussin' mad, an' set dere 'lone a-chewin' 'is lips an' a-wonderin' whut 'e 'd did to make de madam act like dat.

"Pretty soon, de young lady daughteh come down de steps. So de Gin'ral gits up ag'in an' says 'Good-mawnin',' widout puttin' 'is hand out dis time.

"She did n't say nothin', but jes' walks past 'im coldeh dan de madam, widout lookin', and straight into de doh whur de Ma went.

"De Gin'ral wuz crazy by dat time. He felt *awful,* an' wanted to go straight up an' pack 'is bag an' fly. But 'e did n't. He thought 'e 'd be polite ef dey wuz n't. So 'e waited, feelin' like fireworks; an' when de ole man come down, 'e jes' set dere widout movin' ur widout speakin' jes' to see whut 'u'd happen. An' *he* went by, wid 'is nose in de air, straight fur de doh.

"Den de butleh come out, when de Gin'ral wuz so hot 'e wuz mos' baked, an' axed 'im in to prayers.

"Well, de Gin'ral went, ef 'is mind wuz n't jes' fixed fur prayin' at dat minute, fur 'e wuz set on findin' out whut 'e 'd did to make 'em all so hoppin'—an' 'e 'd a heap ruddeh a fit—but nobody did n't look up an' see et. De madam held de Bible on 'er lap an' read: an' den she axed questions ob 'em all, de Gin'ral, too: an' den dey all got down an' prayed.

"Et did n't las' long, an' when dey 'd said *amen,* de madam come up to de Gin'ral an' shuk 'is hand warm-like, an' so did de young lady, an'

de ole man too; an' dey wuz *lovely* ag'in jes' like dey wuz befoh dey went to bed: an' dey tole 'im how dey neveh opened deir moufs to nobody in de mawnin' widout communin' wid de Lawd fust.

"Dat made de Gin'ral maddeh an' eveh, an' 'e said 'e would n't go to dat house ag'in ef 'e wuz settin' in de poh-house an' 'e knowed 'e could git five millions o' dollahs fur doin' et; 'cause dey wuz folks as said de ole man had n't ea'ned 'is money honest an' wuz a ole hypocrite: but 'e only tole ole miss dat."

Rosie glanced at the lengthening shadows without and moved toward the edge of her chair. "Now, Madam, I guess I mus' go ur Miss Jinny 'll think I 'm lost."

"It 's a long way, Rosie; wait a few moments; one of the grooms can drive you down. I 'll show you one of my new Paris gowns while he is getting ready."

When Rosie had exhausted her limited stock of conventional adjectives over the dinner dress which the maid had laid out for that evening, she was moved to speak of Sallie and her art in fashioning gowns.

"Co'se, Sallie don't pertend to do nothin' like

dem grand clo'es, but nobody can't make *ebery-day dresses* betteh an' her. Why Miss Tillman an' Miss McPherson 's ben goin' to 'er dese twenty-five yeahs, an' dey 's great big women, too, yoh know. Co'se, Madam, yoh does n't weah dem trailin' gowns all de time, so I 'd be so glad ef yoh 'd try Sallie some day, fur jes' one o' dem 'bout-de-house dresses; not one o' yoh Sunday dresses o' co'se. Yoh 'd like 'er, I'm shuh; fur she 's had pertickler luck in fittin' fat women like yoh!"

Mrs. Hampton-Yorke sat down with a force that severely tested the endurance of a thin-legged chair and laughed so loud in thinking of the choice bits Rosie had provided for her dinner talk that evening, that a low-voiced servant entered and departed unnoticed.

"De boy says de kerridge is heah," said Rosie, glowing with self-satisfaction. "So I 'll wish yoh good-night, Madam."

"Good-night, Rosie. Come soon again and cheer me up. By the way: please tell Mrs. Melrose I received her note and that I will be at her house for our committee meeting to-morrow.

Now, you won't forget, will you? It will save my writing. Good-night."

Sly old Rosie. Keen-witted as any social promoter, she had learned to apply her avocation, "makin' de nobility laugh," to the benefit of her vocation in life.

Elated by fresh triumphs, she descended the grand stairway with the firm, lithe step of the victor. The sordid past had, for the moment, vanished in the carnage of war, and Southern chivalry lived again in the splendours of beautiful, leaf-embowered Newport.

Once more in full possession of an hereditary grace in word and manner, this rare old specimen of *ante-bellum* house-servant made her adieux to the group of wondering old-world domestics which assembled in a side passage to witness her departure, and stepping lightly into an open buggy was driven rapidly away.

"We 's havin' very fine weatheh," observed Rosie, intent upon making herself agreeable to the smooth-faced English groom.

"Hout of doors; but not in the 'ouse since the hold un 's come back."

"De hedges heah is mos' beautiful," said Rosie, thinking to find a more congenial topic.

"They would be if so many rotten people did n't live behind 'em."

"Oh, et 's always ha'd to git decent help. De mos' ob 'em is sech dirty blackguards," observed the old darkey, relapsing into a habit of blunt speech acquired during her long struggle for subsistence. "Be careful sonny, don't upset me."

"Don't fret. You 'd go to 'Eaven straight henough."

"Well, I hopes so; fur I should n't like to go to Hell an' have to meet all de Newpoht rascals oveh ag'in."

"I say," exclaimed the groom, with an admiring glance at his dusky partner, "you *are* fun. You 've got more sense than hour 'ole bunch o' white girls."

"I guess dat 's 'cause my great-gran'faddeh wuz a—*Hinglishman!*"

"See 'ere," said the groom, edging nearer. "Would n't you like to go to Hingland with me to see your great-grandfather?"

Rosie carelessly put up her hand and removed a hat-pin: but as the space between her and the

young man suddenly widened, she pushed it back again and inquired the name of the occupant of a splendid mansion which they were approaching.

"Anna Parkinson."

"Is she a friend o' yourn?"

"No, she 'as n't the honour. She never changes 'er 'elp. They know too much about 'er. She 's hafraid to let 'em go. They get the best wages in Newport."

"Et 's nice to have money."

"She 'as n't hany. 'Er bills hair paid by hold Mel——"

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Rosie with a startled gesture. "I 's los' my comb. Jes' stop a minute. Dere et is," she said, turning to scrutinise the road. "Does yoh min' gittin' et fur me, sonny?"

"No, I don't hif you 'll give me a kiss when we get to the trees there."

"My culluh comes off. I guess yoh 'd fine yoh-self black whur yoh teched me. I 'll think 'bout et anyway. Jes' jump out; I can hole de hoss. I wuz raised on a fahm."

The groom handed her the lines and sprang to the ground.

"Jes' 'bout twenty feet back dere," said Rosie, bracing her feet against the dashboard.

Emitting a shrill whistle between her teeth, she dropped the lines sharply on the horse's back and started down the road at a racing trot. Deaf to the cries of the enraged groom, she kept well in advance of his flying feet and, finally turning at a sharp angle, disappeared in the avenue of trees leading to the mews of the Villa Melrose.

"De hoss 's got a ha'd mouf," observed Rosie, calmly shaking the dust from her black gown, upon reaching the stable door.

"Not 'alf has 'ard has yours!" roared the panting groom, as he halted before her.

"Good-night, Johnny. Thank you!" she said to the grinning stable-boy who had assisted her to alight.

"An' when yoh sees my great-gran' faddeh," she added, with a contemptuous look at the crestfallen groom, "jes' tell 'im fur de sake o' de good name ob 'is country, not to send oveh no moh blackleg scoundrels like *yoh!*"

The following morning, the governing board of "The Association to Provide and Maintain Summer Camps for Poor Boys" had been one

hour in earnest conclave on the shady terrace of Villa Melrose before Mrs. Hampton-Yorke arrived, eloquent with original and amusing apologies.

Radiant with new interest, Rosie cautiously poked her white "company turban" a little farther over the edge of "Miss Jinny's" vine-covered balcony, from whence she had been allowed to hear Thornton and "Misteh Dick," treasurer and secretary, read incomprehensible figures and prosaic words.

The means of raising more money and extending their organization had been variously discussed.

"We have finally hit upon a plan which needs now only your co-operation," said Mr. Melrose, president of the association, to Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, who at once gave solicitous though apprehensive attention. "And that," continued the president, "is to arrange a concert of the first order, at the topmost price, early in the season, before the public is purse-drained and music-saturated."

"For example?" queried Mrs. Hampton-Yorke.

"As Chairman of the Executive Committee," replied Mr. Melrose.

Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, recognising the justice of a penalty for her tardiness, hesitated in secret annoyance before replying.

"Accepted!" cried the president.

"Mr. Chairman," said Dick Wynne hastily, "I move that we adjourn."

"To luncheon," added Mrs. Melrose. "It is two o'clock already."

"Wait—wait!" called Mrs. Hampton-Yorke. "I accept on one condition only: and that is, that Reginald Thornton promise me, here, before all these witnesses, to help me with the artists and take charge behind the scenes the day of the concert. You have so much executive ability, Reg."

"Of course he will!" cried Mrs. Parkinson. "For with the exception of Preston Carter," she added quietly to Thornton, "no man in New York is better acquainted behind the scenes than you. Why, the other night, that brazen creature had the impudence to take his wife to seats in the third row at the Casino, I suppose just to show the chorus they need fear no rival in her."

"But I don't know a chorus-girl in New York," declared Thornton honestly.

"You can help us with the prima-donnas, anyway. I believe you would run after a hand-organ. The girl who catches you will have to grind one or do a musical turn of some sort."

"Fur Gawd's sake!" muttered Rosie, as the company strolled indoors. "Why did n't I know dat befoh? So et 's music whut ketches 'im, is et? Huh?"

Music in its application to Thornton's case, and particularly in its connection with his prospective interest in Villa Melrose, constituted the subject of Rosie's reflections long after the company had finished luncheon and departed.

Paradise could not be more beautiful, she thought, as she gazed at the splendid vine-grown mansion with its balustraded terraces descending, gay in shapely bay-tree and variegated flower, to meet the limitless expanse of blue ocean; and perhaps by a little scheming it might all be hers to enjoy each summer until the Lord sent her to "where the good niggers go!"

The air was soft, yet bracing, and of a purity such as she had never known. Like balm it

possessed her senses and lulled them to peaceful rest. As her eyes closed in blissful revery, the music of old ocean merged slowly into the spirit harmonies of long ago. Once more in dear old Maryland "Miss Mary" was strumming again the old guitar, and her soft, low voice was singing: "We shall meet, but we shall miss him; there will be one vacant chair."

Rosie had nodded too low and awoke, but she remembered the "vacant chair."

"Miss Jinny can *keep* 'im a-settin' in et," she argued, "ef she 'll only leave dat splashin' ole ocean alone an' sing or play to 'im. I 'll tell 'er how Miss Mary caught Marse John, an' she 'll undehstan' widout my sayin' moh. Why she can play dat big thing in de hall whut plays etself, jes' wid 'er feet, an' talk soft to 'im all de time, too."

Somehow the music in the hall came from a guitar and to it Miss Mary was singing, "Oh, my poor Nellie Gray, they have taken her away, and I 'll never see my darling any more. They have taken her to Georgia, there to wear her life away, a workin' in de cotton, cane and corn."

Footsteps sounded on the terrace. Rosie

straightened up and rubbed her eyes. Thornton and Virginia were leaning on the balustrade looking out to sea; and still the rolling waves broke in measured rhythm at the foot of the great gray cliffs.

"Dat 's music," murmured Rosie drowsily. "Dat 's de rightest kind o' music. De Lawd is wohkin' et wid 'is own feet to help de deah chillun on to sayin' de las' wohd."

"Don't wake her!" whispered Miss Melrose to her maid upon coming in to dress for the afternoon drive. "Sleep is sweet at her age—dear old Rosie!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ROSIE AT THE WALDORF.

1. The Charity Concert.
2. The Prima-Donna.
3. The Red Screen.

"All but dead. Just alive. If I exist after to-day I swear I will never again go on a committee with women. You never know what fools they can be until you have tried it."

Mrs. Hampton-Yorke.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROSIE AT THE WALDORF.

I.—The Charity Concert.

"All for sweet charity," continued Thornton half to himself, as he peered through the curtains after Dick; "but none in their hearts for one another. They'll be in here presently, stabbing people in the back like a lot of bandits."

A slave at heart, Rosie approved none other than a life of bondage for the black race.

While under the spell of plutocratic Newport, mingling as she did with an army of obsequious retainers, all of whom were thoroughly imbued with the spirit of caste, Rosie lost the memory of freedom's forty-odd years of heart-rending vicissitudes and she returned to New York fondly deluding herself with belief in a revival of the golden days "befoh de wah." Her gratitude to

Thornton, to Mrs. Hampton-Yorke and to the ladies Melrose, was equalled only by the jealousy with which she guarded their exalted names. Their homes formed a triple shrine at which she worshipped with a heart like unto a great geyser of love. Even her fondly anticipated "jubilee" became, by September, a mere perfunctory affair —a sort of farewell to the arrogant leaders of Seventh Avenue coloured aristocracy.

Then Rosie reconstructed her creed and lived up to the dignity of the wonderful gold frame which encircled the likeness of her grandly bedecked self and glorified the section of wall above her bed. Through a course of reasoning comprehensible only to herself, she conceived the idea that an unaccountable delay in the completion of Thornton's portrait explained his lukewarm wooing of "Miss Jinny," and that he was waiting to throw it in as a sort of bonus when he offered himself. Consequently, every interruption of the sittings was treated with the most wrathful disfavour by the old darkey; even a fortnight's visit from his beloved mother and sister severely tested her loyalty. And scarcely had they gone, when preparations were begun for the great

matinée planned at Newport to aid "The Association for Providing and Maintaining Summer Camps for Poor Boys."

On the day of the concert, in mid-December, Thornton stopped her wearisome imprecations upon boys in general by inviting her to assist behind the scenes at half-past three o'clock, enjoining upon her the necessity of appearing in a simple black gown with white collar and cuffs.

Rosie's joy at this mark of distinction temporarily stifled all other considerations, and it was a much excited old mammy that found herself in the throng crowding the approaches to the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria shortly after the hour appointed.

After dodging about to consult constantly the wrong person, she finally chanced upon the way behind the scenes through a broad entrance whose plate-glass doors stood invitingly open. At first glance, this quiet corner under the first tier of boxes appeared deserted. Straight ahead, three broad steps carpeted in the prevailing color, royal red, led to the open stage; and facing her, over the tops of the palms banking each end, rose the

two tiers of plush and gold boxes which almost encircled the splendid auditorium.

Heavy curtains shut out the light of day on the left, whilst another set divided this artist's nook from the audience on the right; and here, at the parting of the folds, Rosie came upon Thornton's "visiting valet," Fritz, deep in contemplation of the gathering crowd.

"So dat 's de way yoh does de young masteh's wohk, is et? Huh?"

The old darkey's grimace at receiving no response foreboded evil for the negligent lad. She glanced helplessly at the objects in the room, then, earnestly at her empty hands, and suddenly bethought herself of a more effective weapon. With a malicious look she drew a long hat-pin, held it manacingly before her dilating eyes, and moved on tiptoe toward the unsuspecting Fritz.

On second thought she halted, restored the hat-pin to its place, and pushed the sharp point to its limit. Then, nearing him softly, she stooped to pick up his hat. A deft twist of her head, a cry of pain, and the valet fell into a blind struggle with the curtains.

"Fritzie, deah!" exclaimed the old darkey benignly. "Did one o' my rose-tho'ns stick yoh?"

"What you mean?" cried the lad, snatching angrily at his hat. "You old *Pfingstochs!*"

Rosie's spirited imitation of "Pfingstochs" sounded like a gasoline "pit-put" in motion. "I is n't goin' to have no sech 'ludin's to my fambly in disrespectable Dutch," she cried, as she drew the cruel hat-pin and drove the valet toward the door. "I 's 'ristocratic ef my skin *is* black; an' all de Dutch rolled into one is n't dat! Take yoh place an' shet dem dohs!" she added, with an imperious flourish of the hat-pin. "Yoh 's heah to open an' shet 'em fur de musicianers."

"Hello, Rosie!" cried Dick Wynne, as the plush curtains fell to behind him. "You here?"

"Yes, Misteh Dick. I 's a-helpin' de lady-musicianers off wid deir clo'es."

"And I am head usher," laughed Dick; "a regular family affair, is it not? Where is Mr. Thornton?"

"Here he is, Mr. Wynne," replied Fritz, holding back a wing of the door.

"I say, Reg," exclaimed Dick, hurrying toward

him, "the floor is packed and people pouring in. What shall we do?"

"Fill in under the balcony with gilt chairs," replied Thornton with an air of proprietorship, "and remember: the instant the music begins, close the doors upstairs and down, and don't let a soul enter or leave until the number is finished: and tell the boys to enforce *silence*—even if they have to hiss."

"All for sweet charity," continued Thornton, half to himself, as he peered through the curtains after Dick, "but none in their hearts for one another. They 'll be in here presently, stabbing people in the back like a lot of bandits."

He turned away with a sigh and stood looking at Rosie's hat.

"Where did you get that?"

"Miss Jinny gib et to me," said Rosie with a guilty smile, mindful of his orders.

"Miss Melrose should not give you such conspicuous things," said Thornton, with unmistakable annoyance.

"Oh, don't say dat, honey!" replied Rosie impulsively. "Miss Jinny *lubs* yoh so much!"

"Rosie!" he said sharply. "Don't let me hear you speak that way again!"

"Well! Mr. Tho'nton, chile," declared the much indulged old mammy, with full appreciation of her opportunity, "I is n't blind ef yoh *is!*"

"Go take it off!" he commanded, with a peculiar tremor in his voice. "This instant!"

"Whut? My hat? My beautiful hat wid de wide ribbons an' de great red roses!" she moaned, as she shuffled dejectedly away. At the door she halted for a last word: "Is I got to take off my pink cawsets an' my blue gahtehs? *She* give 'em to me, too! Huh?"

Thornton turned silently away to study the rapidly filling boxes, and Fritz replied for him with a wink.

"Fritz!" ejaculated Rosie in awesome tones. "Ef yoh fohgitteh wuz a thinkeh—yoh—would n't —*make faces*—at—de *cook!* Yoh 'll be—*sorry*—when yoh 's—*hongry.*"

Rosie stepped indignantly over the threshold and removing her hat, deposited it on a chair next to a table heaped high with superb flowers for the artists, and demurely returned to the artists' corner as the curtains were held apart by

two ushers and Mrs. Hampton-Yorke swept majestically up to Thornton.

"Buon giorno, Maestro!" she articulated with emphasis. "How are you?"

"A little foot-light fever," he replied, lifting her hand to his lips, "that is all. How are you?"

"*All but dead!* Just alive! If I exist after to-day, I swear to you I will never again go on a committee with women. You never know what fools they can be until you have tried it. Why, they have run confusion into my household and even into my social engagements. Instead of going to Mrs. Winton's luncheon last week, I went *to-day* and found her alone, eating a tough omelette off dirty linen. I had always heard she lived like a pig in order to entertain three times a year. Served her right to be caught, 'though it did give me frightful indigestion. Is everything all right?"

"Thus far," laughed Thornton, rapping thrice on the table and handing her a programme. "I think it looks rather well. Don't you?"

"New York has never seen anything like it," affirmed Mrs. Hampton-Yorke.

Lifting her lorgnettes she read aloud:

"Concert for the benefit of the Fund for Providing and Maintaining Summer Camps for Poor Boys, Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, Thursday Afternoon, December Fifteenth, at Four O'clock. Madame Stella, Miss Lucille Brandon, Signor Nitroni and Signor di Biancho. Mr. Johannes Eckhoff at the Piano.

"Programme," she continued, turning the page. "Nine numbers. Just long enough. Stella, *three* times! What a dear! She has been so sweet about the whole thing."

"Very true," said Thornton, "for she 's awfully mercenary, and *hates* to sing for nothing; but, she has vowed vengeance on me for getting her into it. So, I told her we had appealed to her because we knew she liked—*the boys.*"

"Well?" questioned Mrs. Hampton-Yorke eagerly.

"That put her in a good humour."

"But what did she say?"

"You are ——— right, I do: only—I prefer them a trifle older!"

"Does n't *all creation* know it?" shrieked Mrs. Hampton-Yorke in delight. "After that scandal-

ous affair with Prince Charlie she ought to fall on her bended knees before us and *beg* permission to sing! She needs our backing to reinstate herself. *That* is why she consented to sing gratuitously to-day! Look at that list of patronesses! Every New York woman of social prominence!

"Then, too," added Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, with a mysterious air, "it is something to her to be led upon the platform by New York's most distinguished social and financial representative!"

"Hugh Melrose?" inquired Thornton in surprise.

"Did I not tell you?"

"I thought you a friend of his wife?" said Thornton significantly.

"Don't!" protested Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, with eloquent gesture. "It has worn my conscience threadbare, already. But one must make sacrifices for charity, you know."

"They say," she added, when Thornton's laughter had subsided, "if she once get her eye on a man, he may as well throw up his hands first as last."

"It will be an even race between her and Melrose, I fear," said Thornton, shaking his head.

"Melrose!" Mrs. Hampton-Yorke lifted her hands in horror. "Establishments here—there—everywhere! I 'm in a perfect fever about bringing that pair together."

"I don't care what happens, if Stella only arrive on time," said Thornton, glancing anxiously at his watch.

"Are the other artists here?"

"All of them. Listen! Open the door an instant, Fritz."

As the boy obeyed, a wave of discord rushed out at them. The tenor was running up, and the bass down the scale, with the violin wailing in agony over both.

"Sounds like a menagerie!" declared Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, turning to scan the boxes through the palms. "Can't recognise a soul."

"Fritz," said Thornton, again glancing nervously at his watch, "tell the electrician to turn on the lights. We begin in five minutes," he added, as a flood of brilliant light suddenly illuminated each face in the fashionably dressed audience to the furthermost corners of the splendid ballroom.

"What treachery!" ejaculated Mrs. Hampton-

Yorke, seemingly in response to a hum of expectancy without.

"See here, Thornton. It 's an outrage," she continued, shaking her diamond-studded lorgnettes at the opposite side of the house; "the two most conspicuous boxes in the first tier packed with Mrs. Bancker's poor relations! I am not a snob, as you know; but you *can not* get on without figureheads in New York. Some incongruous phase of republicanism demands them, and a democratic public tips its nose if they are not nailed to the front row. The matter was fully discussed in meeting and made a feature of this entertainment. We catered to idiotic tastes in order to make friends as well as money for our charity. I knew the Banckers were out of town until Christmas and said so; but Anna Parkinson, in order to effect some trivial personal gain, has *ruined* the tone of our entire house. I should not blame Stella for claiming she had been coaxed here under false promises and refusing to sing. We assured her the Ultra-Smart Set would be here in a body to give her a rousing welcome: and that, she knows, is all she needs to make society reporters cease wondering whether she is

to be recognised socially in the face of those horrible scandals."

"Oh, my dears!" cried a penetrating voice; and Mrs. Francis Parkinson, radiantly conscious of her priceless sables, dropped the red curtains between her excited self and the envious throng under the boxes. "Why did n't we ask *ten* dollars a ticket. The place is so packed I could scarcely wedge through under the balcony. People would have paid any price to see Stella at close range after all that newspaper notoriety. Is n't it *awful* how we let our opportunities slip! Well," she added with resignation, "as it is, we have over six thousand dollars, not counting the money taken in at the door."

"Look!" responded Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, directing attention to Mrs. Bancker's eager guests. "What—did—I tell you?"

"Heah dat, Fritz?" whispered Rosie, turning her contemptuous gaze away from Mrs. Parkinson. "De Bible says, 'Dem as has, gits!' Et 's mighty suhtain dat dem as has n't, does n't git. Thank Gawd, Roxana 's got 'nough to bury 'erself wid an' fool de night-doctehs while she 's *decent*—an'—*clean!* Humph!" she finished, with

a disdainful snort for the account of the lady in sables.

Fritz opened the door for a busy little man with eye-glasses, who rushed in, watch in hand.

"Four o'clock," he said to Thornton. "Shall I begin?"

The amateur impresario continued to fumble his watch nervously, and again he glanced dubiously at the corridor beyond the glass doors. "I *say,* Eckhoff; one day of this will do for a lifetime!"

"It fills sanitariums," said the accompanist, with a quiet smile.

"And yet," continued Thornton, "an unsympathetic public resents it if an impresario wear a halo for the briefest interval of time."

"Don't worry," admonished Eckhoff, "Stella is third on the programme and sure to be here by that time. You must accord to prima-donnas a little more license than to other people."

"Very well," sighed Thornton. "Bring the violinist in. We will begin at once."

"Whut 's de matteh, dahlin'?" inquired Rosie of Thornton, as Fritz let the accompanist pass out.

"Madame Stella is not here."

"She 'll come. My Lawd, dere 's Miss Annie an' Miss Jinny. Dey 'll cheer yoh up, honey."

The two ladies had just come within the curtains as Thornton turned to receive them.

"All sorts of disquieting rumours are afloat," began Mrs. Melrose, with a show of anxiety. "The audience thinks Stella is not to sing. Some say she has pneumonia; others, that she has been injured in a collision on the avenue;——"

"What?" cried Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, who had heard only the last words. "A collision?"

"It is only a report," said Mrs. Melrose, trying to quell the alarm of the group forming around her.

"Some think she had no intention of singing at all," added Virginia.

"Why do people start such silly rumours?" inquired Thornton as he and Virginia drew away from the matrons.

"It is perfectly natural," said Virginia. "The first concert appearance of the greatest star at the opera is an *event*. I never knew such excitement about a singer, anyway. People are crazy about her voice. Mr. Wynne has just had all the glass

doors thrown open and the ticket-takers changed to the outer entrance in order to accommodate the overflow in the foyer."

A heavy door at the farther end of the artists' corridor swung back and Thornton started eagerly forward. Virginia put out her hand to stop him. "It is only Uncle Hugh," she said.

"Am I too early?" inquired Mr. Melrose, stepping leisurely over the threshold.

"Madame Stella has not arrived. We expect her at any moment. We are ten minutes late and———"

"Is not this she?" said Mr. Melrose, interrupting Thornton, as Fritz again opened the door.

A breathless silence in the artists' corner greeted the entrance of a mature-faced young violinist in very short skirts, who was followed by the accompanist and a middle-aged lady, evidently her mother, carrying a folio of music and a violin.

An anxious group surrounded Eckhoff, whilst Rosie relieved the young artist of her cloak and indicated a corner table to Mrs. Brandon.

"What of Stella?" queried Mrs. Hampton-Yorke.

"She was in glorious voice last night at seven

o'clock when I rehearsed with her," replied Eckhoff. "She is probably delayed on the avenue. It is always blocked at this hour. I 'll go right on with Miss Brandon, anyway, and if she is n't here when we finish, we 'll take an encore—*quick!*" The accompanist moved off with a laugh and began to assort the music lying on the table.

Mrs. Melrose and Mrs. Parkinson turned to converse with Mrs. Brandon and Lucille, who was tuning her violin.

Mr. Melrose and Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, with their eyes on Thornton and Virginia, were speaking earnestly in subdued voices when interrupted by an inquiry from Mrs. Parkinson: "You know Mrs. Brandon?"

"Brandon?" repeated Mrs. Hampton-Yorke mechanically. "Brandon? The mother of the violinist?"

"Yes."

"Of course. A pretty, sweet-faced woman. I met her some years ago in London."

"She says you never remember her when you meet."

"Then why does n't she speak to me?"

"She 's sensitive."

"Sensitive? Sensitive?" retorted Mrs. Hampton-Yorke derisively. "Humph! Then why did she come to New York? New York is no place for *sensitive* people!"

"She is right here," said Mrs. Parkinson, softly.

Mrs. Hampton-Yorke lifted her lorgnettes aggressively, and drew back for a comprehensive view of the two Brandons. "How the daughter has grown! She can't be a day under twenty. Now—*why* do they show her legs like that?"

"Oh, my dear, do be careful," said Mrs. Parkinson, turning from the Brandons with a nervous laugh. "They *must,* you know. It is their first season in America and those legs are part of the business. They have to keep her the 'Child Prodigy' in order to make it pay. Unfortunately, her art has not grown with her body. They claim she is only fourteen."

"I see! I see! They worked it the opposite way and ran a new tuck in her skirt each birthday. Where do they propose to draw the line?"

Dick Wynne suddenly dashed through the curtains and up to Thornton. "It was marked

'urgent,' " he said, extending a sealed envelope, "so I thought you ought to have it at once."

"Good heavens!" muttered Thornton, hastily tearing it open. "Just as I expected," he added excitedly. "It 's from Stella! Ask Eckhoff to step this way."

The three men conversed inaudibly, although the assembled company listened in breathless silence; for, in the auditorium, light, isolated plaudits had increased in volume until the great audience now thundered out its impatience.

Eckhoff drew Dick to the curtains long enough to locate some one for him in the crowd, then, turning to Lucille, led her quickly to the platform.

Thornton hastened to the curtains as a brilliant burst of music marked the opening of the concert, and spent a moment anxiously scanning a distant part of the house, before he turned to the silent group behind the scenes and motioned for all to draw nearer.

Deaf to the sound of the violin, they listened in a leaden silence like that which sometimes precedes a destructive storm, while Thornton read aloud the letter in his hand.

" 'Dear Mr. Thornton:

" 'I am in despair! I cannot possibly sing this afternoon. I awoke hoarse this morning; and no amount of skilled treatment has, thus far, relieved me. I hoped, from hour to hour, that I could go on and sing one song at least in order not to disappoint the committee and the public. Please tell them both how grieved I am.' "

"Grieved!" interrupted Mrs. Hampton-Yorke in a rage. "*She* grieved! Little *she* cares —the nasty thing. She is a creature of impulse, as her whole career abroad proves. She deserves *all* they say about her! Don't you see her trick? She sends word at the last moment in order to prevent our getting another prima-donna to take her place: for she knows they would all give their heads to have her chance with such a public,—such a——"

Mrs. Hampton-Yorke met Mrs. Melrose's steady gaze for an instant and added mildly, "———list of patronesses."

"How can we ever face that audience now!" moaned Mrs. Melrose.

"It is the unkindest thing I ever knew!" added Virginia, with unusual severity.

"It is the *meanest!*" added Mrs. Parkinson, bitterly. "Five dollars a ticket! One hundred dollars for boxes! Oh! It is *detestable* in Stella! The Fresh Air Fund people will make our winter unbearable, gibing us about it!"

"It 's a public insult to Society—*individually;* and—we can't let it go *unrebuked* at the opera!" cried Mrs. Hampton-Yorke.

"Prima-donnas will be prima-donnas," said Mr. Melrose, with the wise smile of the experienced opera-director.

"Please give Mr. Thornton a chance to finish," said Virginia, with whom he had shared the offending letter for perusal.

The indignant matrons were silenced with effort before Thornton was allowed to continue reading: "'If you knew how it hurts——'" "Hurts!" sniffed Mrs. Hampton-Yorke scornfully. "'——hurts me to do this,'" Thornton repeated with emphasis, "'you would all feel a little sympathy——'" "Sympathy!" hissed Mrs. Parkinson. "Yes: she 'll get *sympathy* when the public hears this!" "'——sympathy for me, too,'" resumed Thornton. "'I can appease my

own feelings only by enclosing a cheque to aid your noble charity.

" 'With the request that you make my very sincere apologies to your distinguished committee and to the audience, I am,

" 'Faithfully yours,

" 'MARIE STELLA.' "

"Postscript!" cried Virginia, holding a bank-cheque face out that all might read.

"One thousand dollars!" vociferated the matrons in concert. *"One thousand dollars!"*

"Really, that is *too* sweet of her," said Mrs. Melrose emphatically; "for she can't be so enormously rich."

"Well," was Mrs. Parkinson's verdict, "she is sincere, at least."

"She is more," added Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, "she is *noble!* I don't believe any of the nasty things they have said about her. She 's a *decent woman.* I shall stop in to see her on my way home and arrange a dinner in her honour."

"So shall I," exclaimed Mr. Melrose, with unwonted frankness. "Or rather—," he added, upon noting the frigid silence with which his generous declaration had been received, "you will

—Anna. You and Virginia ought to inquire after her, at least—on your way home."

"We will, Uncle Hugh," said Virginia, coming loyally to his aid, "for my sympathy has gone over to Madame Stella. Only a good heart could prompt such an act. The calcium-light of publicity magnifies very petty details sometimes."

"It is certainly pleasanter *behind* than in *front* of it—just now," observed Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, with a gesture to indicate both the audience and the catastrophe descending upon it.

"Rather!" declared Mrs. Parkinson, with dramatic fervour.

"It *is* a—plight," said Mrs. Melrose woefully. "What *shall* we do?"

"All right, Reg! She will do it!" cried Dick Wynne, hurrying through the door—unseen by the excited group.

"Who? What?" cried everybody, rushing toward him.

"Sing!" laughed Dick. "She 'll go to the artists' room with Mrs. Eckhoff as soon as that child finishes playing."

"But who?" cried all impatiently.

"Some prima-donna; I don't know her name. Do you, Reg?"

"I don't recall it; but Eckhoff says she will create a regular furor."

"Is she from the opera?" inquired Mrs. Melrose.

"Not ours," replied Thornton. "She 's from Italy; an utter stranger; arrived only last week; a pupil of Eckhoff's years ago: came with his wife to-day."

The relieved sigh of the group was lost in a storm of applause from without, and Eckhoff, followed by Lucille Brandon in a glow of enthusiasm over her triumph, tripped lightly down the steps into the artists' corner.

"Back, my dear, back and bow," cried Thornton, hurrying the violinist toward the stage. "Take your encore after your second number; not now."

"We must push straight along," said Thornton to Eckhoff, "or we 'll never finish on time and the artists will go crazy if they see the audience thin out. There is Nitroni at the door. Rush him right out. The lady will sing; so we are all right."

The applause ceased abruptly as Lucille descended the steps the second time, and Nitroni, escorted by Eckhoff, strode magnificently through, bowing without looking at the smiles of greeting.

"They hate to talk before singing," said Thornton apologetically, and the onlookers patted their hands gently as the favourite bass of the opera ascended the steps.

In an instant Nitroni had wheeled about and, feeling himself well out of the way, bowed and smiled recognition to each in turn.

"Hurry up, Nitroni. They 'll have a fit; they 'll think you are not coming!" cried Thornton, running up the steps.

Nitroni laughed good-naturedly, and hurried through the palms to receive a demonstrative welcome from the audience.

"So far, good!" exclaimed Thornton, as the piano sounded without. "Now who is going to make the speech?"

"You!" cried all in unison.

"And hear them say, 'It all comes of letting an amateur run the show'? Not I; you will all recall my promise to help behind the scenes on condi-

tion that no one mentioned my connection with it."

"That is true," replied Mrs. Melrose. "Where is Hugh?" He was not visible, and neither nook nor cranny was large enough to conceal him. "You see," continued his wife, "the men leave it to us. Well, my dear, there is no help for it, you will have to go on and make the speech."

"I?" shouted Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, in close rivalry to Nitroni's resonant tones.

"Certainly! You are a recognised *leader.* Your mere appearance on the platform would atone in great measure for Stella's absence."

"What? Lend myself to such a dime-museum act?"

"I tell you, my dear, this is no jesting matter. Those people have paid their money to us and we must give them full return or bear the consequences. You are *chairman* of the concert committee, anyway."

"I don't care what I am. Every one of those boys may land in the bottom of the lake before I will do such a thing!"

"'*One must make sacrifices for charity, you*

know,' " said Thornton, with a significant smile. "Think of the audience."

"The audience can go to the Devil!" declared Mrs. Hampton-Yorke planting herself squarely and defiantly on a trembling gilt chair. "Nothing short of a derrick can move me now!"

"But think, my dear," groaned Mrs. Parkinson; "five dollars a ticket!"

"To see the heroine of the scandal!" retorted the chairman of the concert committee. "You had the sale of tickets and boxes. Why don't you go on?"

"As one of the Melrose Harem," she added, turning away that none but Thornton might hear.

"Oh, no!"

"Certainly," insisted Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, nettled by Mrs. Parkinson's nervous wailing; "she never kept a carriage until he took charge of her investments."

"I?" cried the lady of the sables, smarting under the innuendo evident in Mrs. Hampton-Yorke's sarcasm. "I? Nothing would induce me! I would rather face a jungle! I can never look one of them in the eyes again! Dear Mrs. Melrose," she continued persuasively, "your

presence alone would inspire confidence. People would never question our good intentions if *you* went on and explained to them."

"Some one ought to say a courteous word to the prima-donna," responded Mrs. Melrose, calmly taking her departure.

As the glass door closed after her, Virginia gave a surprised laugh. "Why here is Uncle Hugh!" she said, dragging him out of the curtains where he had been watching the audience. "He will do it, I know."

"Of course!" cried the others.

"It was n't nice of you to let us get into another fight. It is the fiftieth since we organised our committee," said Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, encouraged by Mr. Melrose's mischievous smile.

"The people outside enjoyed it *so much*. It would have been a pity to disappoint them."

"Did we talk too loud?" inquired Mrs. Parkinson.

"No matter," said Mr. Melrose soothingly; "they 'll never complain about not getting their money's worth."

Mrs. Hampton-Yorke laughed; Mrs. Parkinson sulked; and Nitroni came leisurely down the

steps followed by great applause and isolated *bravi* from the audience.

The artist gracefully acknowledged the greeting behind the scenes, and quickly returned to make his bow. As he again came into the palms the plaudits abruptly ceased and dead silence fell over the audience.

"Unheard of!" said Mrs. Parkinson under her breath. "Nitroni always gets a *double* encore. They are simply *mad* to hear Stella!"

"Our entire future, our lives even, hang upon that girl," ejaculated Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, half closing her eyes and sniffing resignedly at a bejewelled vinaigrette. "I wonder what she is like."

There was no one to reply.

Eckhoff had hastened to the artists' suite of rooms with Nitroni, after writing the primadonna's name on a card for Mr. Melrose who was already thoughtfully ascending the platform. Suddenly a stifled groan floated in from every quarter of the crowded ballroom. Then intermittent applause proclaimed recognition of the great financier—the president of the association giving the concert.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," his voice rang clear throughout the house, "it is my unpleasant duty to announce the sudden hoarseness of Madame Stella and her consequent inability to sing for us to-day."

A murmur of protest interrupted the speaker. Raising his voice he continued:

"A note informing us of her indisposition has just arrived; and as evidence of her deep regret and good will she has most generously enclosed her cheque for *one thousand dollars—one thousand dollars*—to swell the already handsome fund for our noble charity."

A burst of applause and cries of "Brava Stella —brava!" gave new courage to the speaker, who continued in a more genial tone:

"I trust that your heartfelt interest in this great charity, as evinced by your presence here to-day, will, to some extent, mitigate the keen disappointment that all must feel in not hearing Madame Stella's phenomenal and beautiful voice."

Mr. Melrose paused. Furious applause behind the scenes was greeted by a general smile in the silent ballroom.

"The Guardian of Good Deeds has, however,

come to our aid; for a young compatriot, fresh from triumphs in the leading opera-houses of Italy, who chanced to be in the audience, has generously consented to help us out of our dilemma.

"I am sure you will all be happy to join in a rousing welcome at this impromptu début for—*Miss Vidalli!*"

II.—The Prima-Donna.

"As the song soared passionately upward and fell again in plaintive cadence, memory grew tender over the heart-tragedies of long ago; lovers of to-day were transported heavenward in sweetest delirium; and unspoken vows trembled on lips that feared their utterance."

A woman of infinite charm and beauty stepped into the frame of the open doorway and regarded them wonderingly with great, lustrous eyes, whose long blue-black lashes and finely lined brows intensified the warm tint of a fair, healthy

complexion. Her glossy hair touched a broad, intellectual brow in soft wavelets and lay in heavy coils on her neck under a black picture hat of clinging ostrich feathers. Her black lace gown of exquisite texture, fashioned simply, completed a picture of elegance and refinement.

"Miss Vidalli," said Mrs. Melrose, entering the artist's corner to make the introduction.

The girl, for she was still in the early twenties, stepped forward with easy, yet formal grace, and gave a half-ceremonious curtsey. Lifting her eyes, she met Reginald Thornton's fixed gaze with an almost imperceptible start. It was for only an instant, but Mrs. Parkinson, looking from one to the other, suddenly focussed her half-closed eyes upon Melrose, who was descending the steps.

"My dear," exclaimed Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, impulsively approaching the young stranger, "if God has accorded you other gifts the equal of these," extending her hand cordially and regarding her face with kindly eyes, "you need fear no rival!"

Miss Vidalli's gratified smile left a faint flush on her soft cheek, as she silently advanced to

accompany Mr. Melrose to the platform. With the promptness of the schooled artist, she turned before the palms to bow her acknowledgment of the hearty applause sent after her, and once more smilingly met Reginald Thornton's questioning eyes.

"My Gawd!" ejaculated Rosie under her breath, in instant alarm. A dignified image of silent woe, she heard the audience catch up the plaudits started by the occupants of the stage boxes and augment them until the house fairly thundered its appreciation of—beauty and an enthralling smile.

"You two have met before," said Mrs. Parkinson, turning sharply to Thornton.

"Never," he replied, with a shake of the head, "but she is the most magnetic creature I have ever seen!"

"Yes," retorted Mrs. Parkinson, nodding slyly, "and Cupid darted down a ray from her eye straight into yours; you will find an arrow in your heart—if you open your coat."

"No need of that," said Thornton carelessly.

"Then don't let Virginia come across the arrow."

Rosie could have strangled the woman for her impertinence, though she heartily agreed with her; for, she claimed for herself alone the right to chide the young master.

The first notes of the piano penetrated a silence almost painful in its tensity. With the exception of Thornton, the members of the group behind the scenes had seated themselves with a limpness that expressed the full agony of the crucial moment, whilst he slipped into the palms to breathlessly scan the house.

With a purity of intonation that betokened the perfect ear, a voice of mellow and bell-like resonance, a rare instrument in itself, recited the theme of "Proch's Variations."

"The stuff great artists are made of—a musician-singer," loudly proclaimed Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, as she called attention to the clearness of enunciation and splendid attack of the first variation; for with the jaded, satiated taste of the spoiled worldling, her enthusiasm demanded instant and *inexcusably* noisy expression. "Good Heavens, Rosie! What is the matter?" Rising to her feet with the other ladies who sought points of view in the folds of the curtains,

as spontaneous applause from the audience drowned the cadence of a variation, Mrs. Hampton-Yorke approached the old darkey, who was biting convulsively at her crumpled handkerchief. "Are you ill?"

"No—Madam," replied Rosie with spasmodic contortions of her body. "I is n't jes' hea'd nothin' like dat befoh. Et kind o' tickles my stummick, I guess. Et 's like de big cage in de pahk befoh de birds gits tired in de mawnin', an' all ob 'em singin' to oncet."

Again the old mammy doubled up with laughter as a rain of crystalline staccato notes threw the great assemblage into uncontrollable excitement.

"A great artist! The legitimate successor of Stella!" cried Mrs. Hampton-Yorke.

Then a prolonged trill, begun softly, swelled until its glad notes raced vibrantly along the frescoed ceiling as if seeking an outlet to Heaven itself.

"F in altissimo, surely," cried Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, with uplifted hands, as if trying to follow the flight of the very high note which the singer had struck and held with flute-like purity."

"I guess de larks can't git no higheh, Madam," ventured Rosie, as the florid vocalisation ceased, and the great audience roared *brave* and plaudits after the triumphant singer.

"Here, Custy," cried Thornton, hurrying to the door, "bring in the flowers."

The smiling-faced captain of countless and divers superb entertainments darted in, his arms brimming over with exquisite blossoms. Behind him, a uniformed "bell-hopper" bore a superb bouquet of roses, and, balanced high on one hand, Rosie's wonderful flower hat.

"My Lawd!" cried the old mammy. "Is n't dey butes! Dey suhtainly is.

"Heah!" she shouted, running madly after the bell-boy upon recognising her hat. "Give it to me. Dat ain't no bo'quet!"

"Have you done a stunt, too?" said the lad, with an impudent leer.

"No, I is n't!"

"Then what are you throwin' yourself flowers for?"

"Dat 's my *hat!*" said Rosie, reaching for it.

"Naw it ain't!" drawled the boy, holding it

off at arm's-length. "It 's a flower umbrella for the singin' lady!"

"Is et?" she cried, wrathfully grasping his arm as Custy, admonished by Thornton, hurried through the curtains to the front of the stage. "I wish I had a *cotton* umburell to lay on yoh!"

For lack of better weapon Rosie administered a convincing pinch, and joyfully recovered the beloved hat as the astonished boy shot through the curtains, glad, indeed, to escape with the bouquet and his life.

Miss Vidalli was still on the stage, curtseying low, when the flowers were passed up to her. As she returned through the palms, Thornton was there to receive her.

"I 'll keep this one," she said in firm, sweet tones, retaining the roses and heaping his arms with orchids and lilies of the valley.

Exclamations of gratitude behind the scenes were drowned in tempestuous applause from the ballroom. The singer gave an affirmative smile and Eckhoff followed her back to the stage. A hush fell over the house as the accompanist softly preluded in skilful modulations from the key of the "Variations" into that of F sharp

major, ending with a fragment of theme from James Rogers' popular song, "At Parting."

A murmur of delight from all parts of the auditorium blended with the first word of the lines:

"The sweetest flower that blows,
I give you as we part,
For you it is a rose,
For me, it is my heart!"

In that moment, the brilliant coloratura singer of the phenomenal voice was forgotten: Vidalli was singing straight into their hearts in a language and accents that each understood and craved. The first and greatest emotion of youthful days revived under the spell of the inspired voice and brain: memory grew tender over the heart tragedies of long ago; lovers of to-day were transported heavenward in sweetest delirium; and unspoken vows trembled on lips that feared their utterance as the song soared passionately upward and fell again in plaintive cadence:

"The fragrance it exhales
Ah! if you only knew!
Which but in dying fails,
It is my love for you!"

Behind the scenes Thornton alone stood, as in a dream, his head bowed over the flowers which his arms still encircled. Mrs. Parkinson distracted him with a motion of her lorgnettes.

"The most beautiful voice I ever heard," he murmured, with a vague smile, as he seated himself on one of the steps and heard the last impassioned utterances of the great singer fade into silence.

"The sweetest flower that blows,
I give you as we part;
You think it but a rose!
Ah, me! it is my heart!"

The spell was broken. The house thundered its appreciation, and Eckhoff tripped as merrily down the steps as had it been his own début. Thornton rose hastily and, depositing his floral burden on the artists' table, stood expectantly at the foot of the steps.

Again and again Vidalli returned to acknowledge the frantic recalls, until, at last, flushed and radiant, she emerged from the palms.

"Will you sing that again?" said Thornton huskily.

Eckhoff shook his head at her: "You have two more numbers, you know."

"I will give you a rose," said Miss Vidalli impulsively, stooping to loosen a half-blown bud before descending the steps.

"They want you again!" called Eckhoff.

"One more bow only," she replied, leaving Thornton the rose and the recollection of an entrancing smile.

Dick Wynne gave Mrs. Parkinson a wise look.

"He 's hypnotised!" declared that ever-observant lady, as Thornton bent over to fasten the bud in the lapel of his coat.

"Hypnotised?" repeated Rosie to herself. "Mr. Dick," she inquired softly, "whut does dat big wohd mean?"

"Conjured!" replied Dick gaily, never dreaming of the pain his answer inflicted.

"I knowed it! I knowed it, de fust time she looked at 'im!" moaned the old darkey to herself in genuine distress. Even her beloved Miss Jinny's sweet, dignified face seemed almost plain by comparison, as the beautiful singer descended the steps to hear from the enthusiastic committee their first expressions of eternal gratitude.

"Thank you," Miss Vidalli murmured, allowing Thornton to take her heavy bouquet.

"Thank you!" he replied heartily. "Thank you for saving the reputation of *several estimable ladies!*"

The ladies laughed joyously.

"You were glorious!" cried Mrs. Hampton-Yorke. "Stella would have croaked out anything could she have foreseen!"

"She 'll be ill over it!" declared Mrs. Parkinson.

"The poor dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Melrose. "She was so generous, too."

"Oh, I hope no one will tell her what a triumph we have had without her," replied Virginia sympathetically.

"Trust *me!*" said Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, with a disparaging gesture. "I 'll tell her we played the Dead March to accompany our grief! She is a *noble soul!* There comes di Biancho. I must speak with him. He sings for me Sunday night."

"Why don't you engage Miss Vidalli, also?" said Thornton. "She would create a sensation."

"I 'll do it!" exclaimed Mrs. Hampton-Yorke. "What does she charge?" she added in an

aside to Eckhoff, who had come in with the pompous tenor.

"One hundred dollars."

The great di Biancho reigned one brief moment behind the scenes and then Eckhoff took him away from Mrs. Hampton-Yorke.

When the wild reception had died down, Miss Vidalli turned to Thornton with a soft light in her beautiful eyes: "Thank you for your suggestion to—that lady."

"Mrs. Hampton-Yorke," said Thornton, supplying the name.

"Let us sit here," he added, drawing two chairs to one side, as the company settled itself for the enjoyment of di Biancho's superb voice.

"Quite as I had pictured her," whispered Miss Vidalli, still intent upon Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, "a general in petticoats."

"And that lady with—Mr. Melrose?" she continued, with a peculiar intonation which did not escape Thornton.

"Mrs. Francis Parkinson."

"You don't typify her," he observed, after a significant pause.

"Pointed ears and a fur tail would!"

"You use your eyes to advantage."

"Intuition," responded Miss Vidalli, shaking her head and ignoring further meaning in his remark.

"What does your intuition say of me?"

"I feel as if I had known you always," she said with the artlessness of a child, and yet—" Her startled look changed to one of deep scrutiny. "I don't even know who you are."

"Reginald Thornton, is my name."

"The famous leader of cotillions?"

"To think of being labelled thus for Eternity!"

"You are a very exalted personage—to us who have viewed society through knot holes in the back fence."

"To you? You are scoffing! Let us talk of the green fields and the woods."

"Gladly; I was born in underbrush."

"You?"

"Literally. That is why I am so strong."

"Where was that sacred spot?"

"Ohio."

"But you came out of the underbrush?"

"Yes, for some finishing touches at a Methodist seminary."

"Well, by Jove! If they are all like you, I should prefer living in a Methodist seminary in Ohio."

"You would n't like it. They give corn-meal mush and apple-butter for breakfast; and then, upon leaving there, your accent would have to undergo a surgical operation."

"Did yours?"

"Many; and they did n't cure it. Nothing but death could!"

"And you have only just begun to live!" said Thornton, half quizzically.

"To-day!" she said quite simply, as she turned from his gaze to hearken for an instant to di Biancho.

"And I, too," he responded softly, reclaiming her attention. "Your voice revealed a new world to me; or else, I never before had a good square look at this old one of ours!"

"You love music."

"I don't know *what* it is—I love. You recall to my mind Mrs. Hampton-Yorke's dissertation on love."

"Is n't she through with that?"

Miss Vidalli smiled involuntarily as she gave a

surreptitious glance at the majestic, self-sufficient matron.

"No," replied Thornton, "for she said to me herself, 'It is *love* which we love! We find an individual whom our mantle of love best fits, invest him with it and immediately begin adoration of that individual. I 'll frankly admit, as *old* as I am, I love *love!*'"

"May be I love music that way," he added, after a slight pause.

"I don't," said Miss Vidalli hastily.

"It is well you do not. The beautiful Narcissus died of longing in contemplating his own reflection. You might die of joy in listening to your own voice."

"I should be resigned to doing that in my prime, if I could become the greatest of all singers. My art is dearer to me than life and all else which it contains!"

"You are young," sagely observed Thornton. "None the less, you must be lonely at times."

"Only when in need of human sympathy."

"Do you need any now?"

"Yes."

"Then I hope you will need it for long," he said, promptly extending his hand.

"How cruel!" she said, accepting it, then dropping it quickly with a swift side glance to note that they were unobserved.

"Only *selfish!* I should n't like to see you sit alone with your art on a pinnacle."

"Why not?"

"I might be conventional and say, I should be sorry to see you so lonely. Truth is—I should want to wring Art's neck; pitch him down the hill and sit with you, myself."

"'And sit with you, myself,'" repeated Mrs. Parkinson, stopping before them as the last note of the song died in a roar of delight from the audience, and the matrons rose to receive the popular tenor. "You have done too much of that already, Reginald Thornton. He is so spoiled, Miss Vidalli! It is our turn now."

"You are a stranger and should know the women first, anyway," she continued in a bantering tone. "Our men are so *compromising!*"

"Men are always what women make them!" retorted Thornton.

"I decline to admit that of New York men.

Wall Street makes and *ruins* them! Heaven only knows what they do outside! We can't get them for luncheon, but at dinner—they are heavy and preoccupied or openly discussing stocks and bonds; and there is no escape for us before coffee. If there happen to be an agreeable foreigner present who has time and mind for us, they fly into a rage and blackguard him—and us! Do you think that we are absorbed in our women's luncheons and women's "Bridge" parties? Not a bit of it! Don't you think us frightfully misunderstood and abused?"

"I know so little of New York," said Miss Vidalli.

"It is there in a nutshell!" declared Mrs. Parkinson, indicating the audience, which was then frantically acknowledging Nitroni's generosity in returning to sing again.

"In boxes you mean," said Thornton.

Mrs. Hampton-Yorke joined the group to observe grimly: "Yes, and none of their grandfathers sat in them!"

"I am curious to know who one woman is," declared Miss Vidalli, with sudden animation, receding a step to see over the tops of the palms.

"There she is! I actually had to hurl all my top notes at her to stop her chatter."

"Mrs. Jerome Mason," said Thornton and Mrs. Parkinson in a breath.

"We could have answered that without looking," continued the latter with a laugh.

"What have they got her in?" inquired Mrs. Hampton-Yorke dryly. "A coop?"

"She has the noisiest box at the opera," sighed Mrs. Parkinson, "and—*next*—to—mine!"

"Oh, her fame has reached farther," Miss Vidalli observed. "It has gone beyond Broadway. Who was she by birth?"

"An Allison," responded Mrs. Hampton-Yorke sharply. "Western people—rich as mud—came here and poisoned four of the best families in New York!"

"Imbecility!" whispered Thornton, tapping his forehead as the chairman of the concert committee drew Miss Vidalli aside to say confidentially: "I hope you won't mind my talking *business?*"

"Certainly not."

"Eckhoff told me your terms for singing. You must permit us to double that amount to-day as

a preliminary expression of gratitude for your magnificent assistance: and I should feel honoured to have you sing professionally for me on Sunday evening at ten o'clock. Come lunch with me to-morrow, quite alone, at half-past one and talk it over." Mrs. Hampton-Yorke supplied her with a visiting-card and extended her hand in farewell. "Thanks to you, we have succeeded beyond anything we could have planned. Now, I shall return to my box and gloat over the sensation you have created."

"Come with me, Anna," she called to Mrs. Parkinson.

"Oh, thank you, my dear. I think I will remain here. It is so hard getting through the crowd."

"Humph!" ejaculated Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, indulging in a bad habit of talking to herself within Rosie's hearing. "Afraid to leave Melrose with Vidalli!"

"I have two extra places. Won't you come with me?" she inquired of Mrs. Melrose.

"Thanks. It is so warm in the boxes. I think I will remain here."

"Afraid to leave Hugh with Anna Parkinson!" muttered Mrs. Hampton-Yorke.

"Well, Virginia will accompany me. Won't you, dear?" she said aloud.

"Thank you so much, dear Mrs. Hampton-Yorke. I have a slight headache; and—it is so much cooler here."

"Afraid to leave Reg with Miss Vidalli," sighed Mrs. Hampton-Yorke. "Rosie, look me over. Is there anything wrong with my bonnet or gown?"

"Oh, no, Madam! You look grand!"

"I suppose that is why I can't get a woman to go with me."

Turning to Dick Wynne, she eyed him calmly. "Your work is over. Come sit with me awhile."

"Thank you! I would n't dare. I have to oversee the ushers, you know!"

"Afraid to leave Virginia with Reg," muttered Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, more amused than piqued. "Humph! I have paddled my own canoe alone for over twenty years! I can do so, still! Good-bye, Rosie!"

With her head thrown proudly back, looking

neither right nor left, she sailed grandly out the open doorway and down the corridor.

"The others have nothing to keep them," Thornton observed significantly to Miss Vidalli; "only Mr. Melrose imagines he must lead you on each time."

"Once is enough by way of introduction," she replied; and turning to the great financier, "I should like to sing your favourite aria for you!"

"Your choice would be my favourite," was the gallant reply.

"You must have a preference."

"Only to hear you!"

"Then my next number shall be specially for you. When I look up—where is your box?"

"Number five. Above us—just the other side of that pillar."

"When I look up it will be to thank you again for the memorable honour you have done me in introducing me to the American public. I shall now go to the artists' room for a moment's repose before my next number."

Miss Vidalli extended her hand with an "au revoir" and started toward the door.

"Come, my dear," said Melrose, approaching

his wife, "Miss Vidalli wishes to rest. We will go to the box."

Mrs. Melrose stopped to express gratitude for the singer's timely and victorious help, and she was inviting her to luncheon and the opera matinée the following Saturday when Virginia joined them.

"I think, Aunt Annie, if Miss Vidalli is not engaged next Tuesday afternoon, it would be delightful if she would come in and sing—professionally, of course."

"It is our day at home," she explained, upon receiving assurance that Miss Vidalli would be happy to come, "and we will make a point of asking people in. Now, if you will kindly give me your address, I will call to see you before then."

"Maison Leroux," said Miss Vidalli. "I don't recall the number: but it is Thirty-fifth Street, just east of Sixth Avenue.

Mrs. Parkinson, seeing the movement to depart and having no longer any one to watch there, came forward with protestations of undying gratitude, and invited Miss Vidalli to drive with her the following afternoon at four. "A brougham, of course, my dear! I would n't risk

that golden voice of yours in an open vehicle."

"Look!" exclaimed Dick Wynne, calling Virginia's attention to a stage box opposite them. "Mrs. Hampton-Yorke is beckoning to us."

"She can see this whole corner from her box," observed Miss Melrose, as she returned an affirmative signal.

"Shall we join her?" inquired Dick eagerly.

"Yes—for a little while!"

And Dick knew that she was thinking of Thornton and the fascinating young singer, though she only half turned without seeming to regard them.

III.—The Red Screen.

"Go 'long. Go 'long," cried the excited old mammy, striking furiously at the valet and dancing a species of hornpipe in a frantic attempt to put the greatest possible distance between herself and the young couple as they emerged from behind the screen."

* * * * * * * * * *

"Dear old Rosie," said Thornton tenderly; "she's so happy to-day! It is a new experience for her."

"O, de Debbil!" moaned the old darkey breathlessly.

"I think," said the prima-donna, taking a smiling survey of the artists' corner, now deserted save for their two selves and the servants, "I might rest here just as well as in the other room, if that screen were placed there to shut off the draught."

"It is done," replied the amateur impresario, removing an embossed leather art work in panels which, when discreetly curved about her chair just off the flight of steps, completely hid Miss Vidalli from the boxes and, also, from the doorway.

A round of applause without was signal for Eckhoff's reappearance and hasty retreat to the artists' rooms, from whence he returned with the violinist just as Nitroni made his final bow and strode dramatically past them to his room in the transverse corridor.

The violin was throbbing out Svendsen's exquisite "Romance," as Thornton walked confidently around the edge of the screen and placing a second chair there, seated himself next to Miss Vidalli. There was no surprise in her eloquent eyes as they rested on his happy face. They had understood each other like two old comrades and fell as naturally into conversation.

"You are, indeed, champion to-day," began Thornton, with a congratulatory hand pressure.

"Do you know how many times you have wrung my hand to-day?" said Miss Vidalli, withdrawing it hastily.

"Certainly! Not half enough!"

"You have the touch of a virtuoso."

"No! Upon my honour, no! It's a natural gift! Just see!"

"Your dexterity is phenomenal in a novice," laughed Miss Vidalli, releasing her hand again and moving her chair back.

"Oh, don't!" said Thornton, in an aggrieved tone. "Do you know, if I were rich, I would found a Methodist seminary!"

"Wreck it, you mean!"

"Greater New York can't turn out a composite girl your equal."

"I am not familiar with the metropolitan product."

"Then God spare you a closer acquaintance!"

"You disparage them."

"Oh, no; they have simply ceased to exist!"

"Since when?"

Thornton looked at his watch. "Since about twenty minutes past four to-day!"

"Oh, you society men!" Miss Vidalli eyed him sharply. "I wonder if your own mothers know when you are sincere!"

"They don't chaperon us."

"I see," exclaimed Miss Vidalli, glancing at Rosie, "a body-guard is more essential. What a commentary on New York society!"

"Body-guard? Rosie?"

"Is the 'razzor' her weapon of protection?"

"No; her tongue."

"Then woe is me. I see murderous intent in those porcelain orbs!"

Unnoticed by Thornton, Rosie had been standing where she could watch them—a threatening figure of Vengeance. Upon seeing herself ob-

served, she lowered her eyes and, assuming an air of indifference, moved discreetly away. That step was an inspiration; for the rear side of the screen seemed beckoning—almost imploring her to come and *listen*—and—yes, *look,* too! Little rays of light pierced the joints between the panels, and at one of them she planted herself with bowed head and attentive ear as Thornton was saying: "She is devoted to my friends."

Miss Vidalli seemed skeptical, for she answered: "Nevertheless she and Stella will keep me alert."

Thornton said simply: "Why Stella?"

"How little you laymen know of my world! Intrigue—you would call it business—is the ladder upon which many climb to fame."

"Stella does not impress me as being that sort."

"The greatest in art show greatest skill in appropriating the honours and perquisites due their rank; and none conceal it so well."

"How *could* Stella hurt you?"

"Not necessarily *hurt—delay* my career here by putting a ban on me at the opera and in private houses. The way to success in New York is through a certain few doors."

"Some of them have already extended to you a warm reception; and they—are your grateful *debtors!*"

"Gratitude is a bubble!"

"Friendship is not."

"Time only proves that."

"Time? How much time, then, do you give me before you dine to-night?"

"We dine at seven."

"We!" exclaimed Thornton almost reproachfully. "Who are *we?*"

"My stepfather and I."

"Oh!" he responded, with an audible sigh of relief. "How many sit at your table?"

"Two."

"How many will it hold?"

"Three."

"Are outsiders admitted?"

"When introduced by *pensionnaires.*"

"I 'll be there to-night!"

"Oh, my Lawd!" muttered Rosie, springing up and down and wringing her hands in despair. "To-night! Poh Miss Jinny! Poh Miss Jinny! My Gawd, whut shall I do?"

Silence behind the screen admonished the

guilty eavesdropper to step aside and apply her eye to another crack between the panels. "Mr. Rainey, my stepfather, will be pleased—if he happen to be sober!" Miss Vidalli paused again, and Rosie affrightedly receded behind a panel and held her breath until a resumption of the conversation gave her courage slowly and noiselessly to seek out a new peep hole. "The family skeleton is less shocking, if one first hear it rattle!"

"I am *so* sorry!" said Thornton, bending sympathetically near.

"My Lawd! My Lawd!" moaned Rosie, turning an agonised face toward the palms and lifting her trembling hands.

"You are what Italians call *sympatico,*" murmured Miss Vidalli in her soft, alluring voice.

"I wish you would confide in me," said Thornton, dropping his half-bantering manner and regarding her seriously. "New York owes me something for leading its stupid cotillions through eight precious years. You shall reap the harvest —if you will!"

His look, his manner, his tender appealing words, "if you will," were too much for Rosie.

"My Gawd! My Gawd!" she cried, clapping her hands over her ears and pacing dejectedly up and down. "De rascal! De villain! De fool! I 's 'shamed ob yoh! A-cuttin' yoh own froat! Ef Miss Jinny knowed whut 'e wuz up to now! Umph!"

"Come 'way!" whispered Fritz peremptorily. "Come 'way! Ze people in ze *loges* laff over you."

"Well—whut ef dey does! Dey can't *see* me!" retorted Rosie, looking at the ceiling above her. "Go 'long!" With an angry gesture she turned her back on the meddlesome boy and resumed her vigil as Miss Vidalli began to speak softly:

"When my father's death, eight years ago, left us homeless, penniless and kinless, my mother and I came to New York, trusting to my voice for support. Starvation began. Then my mother secured a secretaryship; and I addressed business envelopes and newspaper wrappers in a Fourteenth Street office at—*four dollars per week!*"

"An' dat wuz fouh dollahs too much, de huzzy!" interposed Rosie, grimacing and shaking both fists threateningly.

"On Sundays I sang in a Methodist choir.

My mother's remarriage and Eckhoff's offer of gratuitous instruction changed our luck; and, three years later, Mr. Rainey sent me to Italy to prepare for opera. After two years there, I made a brilliant début in 'Traviata.' Suddenly one night, after I had drawn crowded houses, the manager himself had me hissed. Another débutante wanted my place. She had backing and offered to pay handsomely for her appearances; and the manager needed money: for those provincial theatres are always on the verge of financial collapse and resort to every means to keep going.

"This series of misfortunes proved disastrous in every way. Mr. Rainey became discouraged, lost his money, and much of his ambition. Once an editor of repute, he is now a reporter on an evening paper. He can do nothing for me.

"Well, to continue—I risked my last dollar to buy appearances for the remainder of that season. Successes in new rôles brought fame and offers from better opera-houses. I accepted the best for the following season. Toward the end of November, I decided, after an unpleasant experience with the manager, to return home and earn the means

to pursue my career unmolested by such beasts. I arrived here a week ago encumbered by a *décolleté* bodice, which makes of this an evening gown, and a simple blue serge dress. All I possess would barely fill a suit case."

Miss Vidalli flushed slightly and stopped in momentary confusion.

"Go on," said Thornton gently.

"I need another two years of experience before I can command leading positions," she went on as if she had not told all the subject demanded. "Deprivation does not develop voices. I need both physical and mental comfort; a chaperon; and at least the appearance of opulence in order to enforce contracts."

"To-day's victory insures all that."

Miss Vidalli shook her head.

"What have you to fear?" Thornton inquired.

"The waning interest of friends."

"We will keep it active."

"And Stella's influence."

"Trust me to counteract that!" Thornton's soul was in his eyes and drew her into its magnetic embrace. She strove to speak and—put out

her hand. Tenderly, deferentially, he raised it to his lips.

"I must not talk any more," said Miss Vidalli, rising hastily to her feet. "I must save myself for my next number!"

"Come 'way! Come 'way!" Fritz was even then calling as he caught Rosie by the arm. "Ze people bust wid laff!"

"Go 'long! Go 'long!" cried the excited old mammy, striking furiously at the valet and dancing a species of hornpipe in a frantic attempt to put the greatest possible distance between herself and the young couple as they emerged from behind the screen.

They found her half concealed by the plush curtains, apparently watching the audience.

"Dear old Rosie!" said Thornton tenderly. "She is so happy to-day. It is a new experience for her."

"Oh, de Debbil!" moaned the old darkey breathlessly.

Fritz turned away to hide a broad grin; and Rosie, with closed eyes, tried to still her heart-hammerings before resuming her prayers to Heaven for the salvation of "de young masteh,"

and her appeals to the Devil for the frustration of the singing-sorceress.

"Poh Miss Jinny!" she wailed, as the youthful Lucille bowed her acknowledgments to the audience and almost jumped out of the palms in her eagerness to secure an encore. "Et 's Gawd's own mercy whut tuk 'er 'way whur she could n't see dem two debbils a-kissin' an' a-makin' lub. Et 'll break 'er heart! Oh, et 's turrible—*turrible!*"

"Leastways," she added, much calmed by the reflection, "et will be fur *him when I gits 'im home alone.* De debbil! De rascal! De villain! De men beasts whut dey is! Dey 's *all* alike! De Debbil take 'em!"

"Rosie!"

"Yes, dahlin'!" replied the old mammy, wheeling about with a sudden reaction in feeling and expression.

"Miss Brandon will be down in a moment. Have her wrap ready."

The kindliness in his voice was irresistible, and the sight of his calm face so comforting that Rosie began to doubt the evidence of her own senses, especially as Fritz was the only other

person visible. Could she have been dreaming, she asked herself—a dark revolting dream? Rosie actually rubbed her eyes and gazed again long and hard at the screen before venturing to step nearer and look behind it. That look was enough to dissipate doubt and restore her to a clear comprehension of painful facts: for, beautiful as the traditional sorceress, there sat the singer returning her curious stare with a smiling glance of inquiry.

Rosie caught her breath, faltered without daring to respond, and then, deaf and blind to evil signs, resumed her dignified pose by the door. Yet, when she stepped forward to cover the youthful Lucille's mature shoulders, Thornton noted in silent amusement that the index and middle fingers of each hand were tightly locked.

The young prima-donna stood waiting to ascend the steps.

"What will you sing?" inquired Eckhoff.

"The 'Traviata' aria."

"Ah! fors e lui?"

Miss Vidalli nodded, and with a strange, almost shy glance at Thornton, started up the steps.

"I have to play everything from memory to-

day for her—you know," said Eckhoff with a shrug, "and there is a limit to my répertoire."

Thornton smiled absent-mindedly, and stepping aside out of the range of the boxes, placed his fingers under the lapel of his coat and drew the half-blown rose caressingly to his cheek.

As Rosie watched with her very soul in her eyes, she heard him softly repeat:

"You think it but a rose,
Ah, me! it is my heart!"

CHAPTER IX.

ROSIE GETS INTO PRINT.

"What have you?" he inquired mockingly. "Katzenjammer?"

"No, dat ain't de name," replied Rosie, in a suffering voice, as she slipped from her lap a weekly journal and extended it without raising her head.

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"The Social Shotgun," read Fritz laboriously.

"Dey's done published me!" cried the old black mammy hoarsely; and sitting upright, she displayed a countenance besmeared with tears.

* * * * * * * * *

I's disgraced 'im!" cried Rosie, limp with contrition. "An I lubs 'im like 'e wuz my own baby, too. . . . 'E cussed dat papeh up Washin'ton Monument an' down ag'in. 'Deed 'e did! An' I helped 'im, too——to myself; fur et's turrible to be published, Fritz—turrible disgraceful!"

CHAPTER IX.

ROSIE GETS INTO PRINT.

The peak of Rosie's bandana pointed downward. Bowed low over her knees her head swayed dejectedly to and fro to the rhythm of her plaintive moan: "Uh—huh! Uh—huh! Uh—huh!"

Fritz stared in uneasy amazement at the uncanny figure in the dimly lighted kitchen, as the elevator door closed behind him.

"Good-day," he ventured timidly, after he had assured himself that it was indeed Rosie, alive but apparently in an agony of desolation. "What have you?"

Rosie started as if electrified, then slowly turned her head for a sidewise look and, convinced that it was no evil visitant, she resumed her doleful refrain: "Uh—huh! Uh—huh! Uh—huh!"

One look at the empty champagne bottles and unwashed kitchen utensils littering the room brought a mischievous grin to the valet's boyish face. "What have you?" he repeated mockingly. "Katzenjammer?"

"No, dat ain't de name," replied Rosie in a suffering voice, as she slipped from her lap a weekly journal and extended it without raising her head. "Here 't is."

"*The Social Shotgun,*" read Fritz laboriously.

"Dey 's done published me!" cried the old black mammy hoarsely; and sitting upright, she displayed a countenance besmeared with tears.

"Where is it?" inquired Fritz eagerly. "I can't read English good."

"Neveh mind! Et 's all 'bout my peekin' frew de cracks in dat *debbil-screen* at dat *debbil-concert* fur dem *debbil-boys!* An' de nobility in de boxes, de uddeh side ob de stage, wuz bustin' cawset-strings a-wonderin' whut de young masteh an' de singin'-*debbil* wuz doin' behine et when I danced excited-like, an' shuk my fists.

"I 's disgraced 'im!" cried Rosie, limp with contrition. "An' I lubs 'im like 'e wuz my own baby, too!"

"De wust ob et wuz," continued the penitent old darkey after a pause which Fritz had devoted assiduously and vainly to a search for the offending article, "de young masteh did n't know nothin' 'bout et tell 'e read et in de papeh at breakfus' dis mawnin'; an' den 'e tuhned red! an' puhple! an' *green!*—an' *blue!*—an' den—'e *read et to me!*"

"An zen?"

"He—*cussed!*"

"You?"

"Me? Cussed me, 'is ole *mammy?* My Lawd, chile! Whut yoh thinkin' 'bout? Co'se not. Mr. Tho'nton 's a gentleman. Guess 'e 'd kill anybody whut had 'a'. But 'e cussed dat papeh up Washin'ton Monument an' down ag'in! 'Deed 'e did! An' I helped 'im, too—to myself; fur et 's turrible to be published, Fritz—*turrible disgraceful!*"

Rosie showed symptoms of another breakdown until Fritz gently recalled his warning to her at the concert.

"Oh, go 'long!" she cried angrily. " 'T wuz n't my fault! Et wuz yoh *ugly* Dutch-English. You said '*oveh* me,' an' I could n't see de uddeh

side o' de theayter widout my specs on! Yoh see? Humph?"

She felt exonerated and resumed her pleasanter humour. "Et 's all dat singin'-gal's fault—ef she *can* sing betteh nur all de birds. I guess dat 's all she can do, anyway—'ceptin' puttin' spells on men. De *she*-debbil!"

"Zat is *luff!*"

"Her way—o' co'se! *Fust* sight, too!"

"You believe in zat?"

"Love at fust sight? Well, I guess *so!* But I does n't 'prove ob et jes' de same! Uh—uh! Uh—uh!

"Humph!" ejaculated Rosie, her face and manner suddenly illuminated by a memory of long ago. "Had et oncet myself! 'Deed I did! *Bad,* too! Humph! Why de fust time I seed dat black niggeh, I could n't *stan' up* no moh! My legs went jes' like dat undeh me!" she added, placing the tips of two long black fingers on her lap and giving a graphic portrayal of her weak-kneed state.

"Well?" inquired Fritz, in wide-eyed interest.

"Humph?" grunted Rosie interrogatively and mysteriously.

"Did you marry him?"

"Fritz," said the old mammy with a wise look, "yoh 's whut dem little street-debbils calls—*thick*. Dem is n't de folks yoh marry! Co'se not! Leastways, ef yoh does, yoh does n't *stay* married. Uh—uh! When dat happy, confusin' —*fool* feelin' 's oveh, yoh 's *jes' mis'rable—mis'rable!* Oh, my Lawd! Guess I know! Umph!

"Happened to me oncet in Paris, too, whur all dem crazy folks is whut can't speak English," said Rosie, now all aglow with interest in the ever-popular theme.

"Uh—huh!" she interpolated, with a knowing nod by way of punctuation. "Only et wuz de *man* whut had et dis time. Uh—huh! De groceh's boy—a little fat, red-cheeked debbil o' sixteen! Uh—huh!"

"What did he?"

"Made love to me."

"In English?"

"Uh—uh!" responded Rosie with a spirited shake of her head.

"You speak French?"

"No, thank Gawd, I does n't!"

"Zen how haff you understand?"

Rosie looked Fritz disdainfully up and down, elevated her eyebrows and scorned to answer such stupidity.

"Well! I guess I boxed 'is ears *good,*" she continued. "He wuz all red like a lobster when I was frew beatin' 'im. He jes' flew. He flew! He flew! When I tole Miss Mary whut 'is wohds sounded like, she laffed so ha'd I thought 'er cawsets 'u'd go!

"Yas, 'um! Thank you, mam!" said Rosie irrelevantly.

Fritz looked up and down the hall and then at the old mammy as if questioning her sanity.

"De wall wuz a-speakin' to me. Me an' her 's great frens. She always tells me when de young masteh 's stahtin' home. My Lawd! She 's a-crackin' ag'in. Fritz, he suhtainly is in de cahs by dis time! An' I is n't red up sence de big dinneh las' night, neetheh!" Rosie took a lugubrious survey of the kitchen and sighed. "She suhtainly is a sight! She suhtainly is!"

"The hall, too," observed Fritz.

"Well! Yoh is n't tellin' me nothin' new. Does n't I know dey 's rotten dirty?

"Ain't no use reddin' up no-how!" she added peevishly, resting her elbows on her knees to indicate a continuation of the confab. "Gits dirty ag'in! He 's givin' pahties fur dat singin'-bird all de time. Ef she don't stop comin' roun', I 'll git dat nice little fat drug-boy to gib me some moh o' dat stuff whut I put in de cookin' brandy to make Pete stop stealin' et. Dat 'll make 'er tired o' us!" said Rosie, rolling the whites of her eyes portentously.

"Say, Fritz, does yoh know why de plum-puddin' wuz so late las' night? 'Cause I done put Pete's brandy into de *sauce!* I mos' fell out de winder into de co'ht when I tasted et. I tell yoh whut, ef I had n't 'a' jumped in an' made moh, we 'd 'a' had to send stummick-pumps down fur de nex' co'se, shuh!

"Dere she goes ag'in! He suhtainly is in de elevateh! Now, Fritz, honey, does yoh mine openin' up de pahlah an' dinin'-room fur me like a good boy? I is n't ben down to-day. Dey 's jes' like yoh left 'em las' night."

The valet, who had replaced Peachy for special occasions, obligingly complied, and had given the

place a semblance of order by the time Rosie appeared in her regulation house attire.

"Dere 'e is!" she whispered in alarm as the elevator-door slammed without. "I fohgot to shet de ketchen-doh, an' 'is bed ain't made neetheh. *Won't* 'e be mad. I 's got to fool dat deah chile, somehow." Each blink of her shining eyes seemed to punctuate a thought which her tightly pursed lips were not ready to utter.

A key rattled in the lock and a step was heard in the entry.

"Fritz! Fritz!" wailed Rosie, limping along as if in physical anguish. "I 's 'fraid I 's got to go to bed. Ouch! Ouch! Oh, de mis'ry in dese ole bones o' mine!"

"Hello, Rosie!" cried Thornton, fresh from his walk in the crisp wintry air. "What is the matter now?"

"Matteh 'nough; sleepin' out o' dohs ebery night!"

"Oh, Rosie! Rosie! When did you take to such dissolute ways?"

"Disslet ways! Disslet ways! Misteh Tho'nton chile! Yoh knows whut I means good 'nough! *Dohs—winders* wide open de *whole night* an'

all de air whut dey is a-comin' into dis one flat an' leavin' none out o' dohs nowhur!"

"Cheer up, Rosie! Cheer up!" cried Thornton, busy with some letters which had come in since his wrathful matutinal departure. "My sister inquires after you!"

"Oh, thank yoh, honey! How is poh Miss Nellie?"

"Apparently in no need of sympathy. Why do you always call her *poor* Miss Nellie?"

"Well—uh—'cause Miss Nellie 's a *poh—unmarried* chile. She ain't a *settled lady,* yit."

"I infer by that that you favour matrimony?"

"My Gawd!" muttered Rosie, suddenly catching at a chair for support; and taking advantage of Thornton's preoccupation, she whispered to Fritz: "He 's thinkin' ob de singin'-gal.

"Yes, I does, fur—uh—*real folks,*" she said aloud. Rosie had suddenly found her cue and winked sagely at Fritz as she added: "But not fur de *play folks* in de *theayter!*"

"Why not?"

"Dey 's so much jealousy, honey!"

"Everywhere!"

"Yes, dahlin, dat 's so; but et 's *special* tryin'

to see yoh deah wife hugged up *tight* in some uddeh *vile man's* ahms! Ain't et? I thought yoh 'd think so. Uh—huh?"

"You seem to know a lot about it," observed Thornton dryly.

"Co'se I does. Did n't *ouh* lovely, sweet Miss Jinny gib me a ticket fur de operay to see de singin' an' heah de wimmin talk out loud in de boxes? An' a huzzy on de stage whut wuz wuss 'an any *widder,* wuz a-makin' lub in a mountain to a blabbin' fool whut made de sweet, *pure* girl whut loved 'im die o' shame! Yes, suh! Dat lovely—*pure* girl jes' died o' shame fur 'im! Yes, suh! Yes, suh! !"

"Very thoughtless of Tannhäuser to tell on himself!"

"Dey wuz n't no need! Dey wuz n't no need! De folks *all* knowed et an' flew. Dey flew fum 'im! Dey flew! Yes, suh!"

"Mr. Tho'nton, chile! Dey 's lovely, sweet, *pure* girls whut is n't play-actin' an' is a-grievin' deir hearts out 'bout yoh vile men!"

"You are hard on us poor men."

"Oh, I does n't mean yoh, honey! Co'se not! Yoh—would n't do nothin' vile like dat! Oh!

No! Yoh 's a southe'n gentleman an' yoh likes Miss Jinny—too much—to make 'er 'shamed ob yoh—like dat!"

Thornton walked calmly out of the room and up the steps.

"Dat 's de way yoh spanks 'em when dey 's growed up," asserted Rosie proudly to Fritz, who had witnessed her dramatic recital from the pantry. "An' et 's pizen fur de singin'-gal, too. Guess I 'll take my bandaner off," she added, with a glow of satisfaction, as she planted herself before a mantel-mirror.

"Rosie," called Thornton from the top step, "the house is like a pig-pen!"

"Well," replied Rosie, calmly going to meet him; "I knows et 's rotten dirty, chile: gib me time! Ouch! Ouch! Oh, my Lawd!" Stopping helplessly on the second step she looked up imploringly. "Neveh mind me, honey. Run 'long an' git ready. I 'll be up *by-um-by.*"

"I am sorry you feel so, Rosie; but a dozen people will be here by five o'clock and—nothing ready!"

"Well! Dey is n't goin' to set in de bedrooms is dey? An' dey *can't* have my ketchen!"

"But the tea-biscuit and Sally-Lunn?"

"Dey 's ready. Now run 'long!"

Thornton turned on his heel and Rosie, hearing a snicker at the dining-room door, gave a nimble backward kick and suddenly doubled over with silent laughter. "Say, Fritz, yoh 's got to help me. Git out de tea-things quick. Dey 's a roarin' fire upstaihs, an' I 'll do de bakin' befoh yoh can tuhn roun'."

Savory odours from the kitchen gave assurance of good cheer for his guests as Thornton descended the stairway and made a critical survey of his cosy apartment. Then stealthily—with an eye for Fritz's movements—he took a photograph from an inner pocket and, for the fiftieth time that day, studied it long and earnestly. The broadside from *The Social Shotgun,* the chaffing of his office-mates, even the daring rebuke from old Rosie, receded into Memory's furthermost borderland as he feasted his eyes on the beloved and beautiful face. He held it to his lips, to his cheeks, his eyes, his forehead and pressed it

to his heart in rapture. Suddenly the shrill whirr of the electric door-bell recalled him to his environment and to the excuse for bidding his friends in for a cup of tea.

"Miss Driscoll told me to give you this and to be careful." William's thick voice deflected into a grunt as he deposited something heavy and bulky in the entry.

"Wait, Fritz!" Thornton called out anxiously. "It is my portrait. I 'll help you place it on the easel."

CHAPTER X.

ROSIE HAS A SET-BACK.

"At his age a man cares little for the cost, if he get what he wants: and Billionaire Trust directors usually want the moon and stars and a noonday sun or two thrown in, as there is so little else of which they go short."—Mrs. Hampton-Yorke.

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"Now—Mr. Tho'nton, chile; yoh chance 'll be heah dis aftehnoon: an' et ain't de one whut puts on spells whut weahs out like yoh ole pants an' leaves yoh settin'—on—on wuss 'an nothin'. 'T ain't dat kind. Oh, no; et's de kind whut makes yoh comf'table an' keeps yoh decent an' makes yoh chillun proud o' yoh an' her."

CHAPTER X.

ROSIE HAS A SET-BACK.

Rosie stood rapturously examining the rich gold frame adorning Thornton's excellent portrait. "Now won't dat make de deah chillun happy! Humph! 'Deed I guess dey won't know whut to do wid deirselves when dey sees deir *Pa* inside o' dat!"

"What are you talking about?" laughed Thornton.

"De chillun!"

"Children? Whose children?"

"Yourn, o' co'se! Dey is n't no uddeh chillun visitin' dis house; is dey? Huh?"

"Any—*other*—*children*? What do you mean? You *know* I have n't any children!"

"No I does n't! But I *hopes* yoh is n't got any: fur I tuk yoh fur a decent bachelder!"

A snicker from the dining-room caused Rosie to turn angrily and mutter something about "Dutch manners," but no one being visible, she returned to her argument with a serious countenance.

"Now, look y' heah, chile! When yoh tuk dis flat yoh did n't 'spect to do yoh own cookin', did yoh? An' yoh got ebery thing *ready*, too—ef I is woh out two paihs o' shoes a-runnin' oveh to Miss Lynch a-changin' things eveh sence. An' yoh talked 'bout de cook 'foh she come, did n't yoh? Gawd knows yoh 's done et 'nough sence when yoh 's ben mad!

"Now et 's jes' dat way wid a fambly. Yoh gits ready fur 'em while yoh 's thinkin' 'bout 'em. Yoh does n't faint, does yoh, when yoh sees a bird make a nest in a tree ur a pig make a hole in de straw? Huh? Folks looks at et, an' says et 's *pretty*. Does n't dey? Now, fur Gawd's sake, ef et 's pretty fur de bird an' pretty fur de pig, why ain't et pretty fur yoh? Why can't we talk 'bout et? Huh?

"Now, dahlin', yoh mus' let me say somepin' an' yoh *mus' n't* git mad dis time, fur yoh knows I gibs yoh de same lub whut I gib de young

masteh whut died an' lef' me my freedom befoh de wah; an' 'e don't want et no moh now, 'cause 'e went to Hebben, shuh! Yoh 's got yoh flat whut 's *elegant;* an' yoh 's got yoh picture in a grand gold frame whut 's de *startin' ob a fambly on de walls* jes' like Marse John's an' Miss Mary's—but I mus' say heah, deir chillun wuz little *debbils.* Well, I does n't want to disencourage yoh, honey. All chillun is n't dat way 'ceptin' whur de mothehs is got bawned in—*bushes,* an' eat *mush* in *Meth'dist simnaries!* Yes, suh! Yes, suh! Folks whut 's got bawned in bushes like rabbits, is n't got no —*nothin'* behine 'em fur de chillun to be proud of. Dey is n't had no gran'faddeh an' gran'-muddeh, an' great-gran'faddeh an' great-gran'-muddeh whut *knowed* somepin', an' *had* somepin', an' *did* somepin' 'sides mockin' birds to tickle folkses stummicks an' make 'em laff tell dey looks like fools.

"Now fur Gawd's sake, when de mothehs is dat way, *whut* can yoh 'spect fum de chillun? Think in time, honey, fur yoh can't go back when et 's too late! Roxana don't wan't to

see yoh make no mistake. Et would break 'er heart, shuh!"

Rosie paused to compose her ruffled spirit and then resumed: "Dey *is* folks comin' heah dis aftehnoon whut has gran'faddehs an' gran'-muddehs, an' great-gran'faddehs an' great-gran'muddehs whut wuz 'ristocratic *gentlemen* an' *ladies* befoh *Adam an' Eve* wuz; an' *dey* tole me dey 'd git Miss Driscoll to make deir pictures, too, ef yourn wuz good: an' I guess et 's grand! Now—Mr. Tho'nton, chile, yoh *chance 'll* be heah dis aftehnoon: an' et ain't de one whut puts on *spells* whut weahs out like yoh ole pants an' leaves yoh settin' on—*wuss* 'an nothin'. 'T ain't *dat* kind. Oh, no! Et 's de kind whut makes yoh comf'table an' keeps yoh decent an' makes yoh chillun proud o' yoh an' *her!*

"I guess I won't say no moh," said Rosie with a look of superior intelligence at the ceiling. "Dey 's folks whut *can* undehstan', an' dey 's folks whut *can't.* Roxana 'll wait an' see."

The sudden whirr of the electric bell came as an unwelcome interruption. Thornton

glanced at a mantel-clock. "Always the way!" he muttered, stepping into his alcove-library, as a familiar voice, pronouncing his name, called up visions of magnified editions of the latest *Social Shotgun.* "Invite people for tea and they come when they like!"

"This way please, Madam," said Rosie, leading Mrs. Parkinson up to the new portrait.

"Splendid! A positive success!"

"Framed only in gold," continued the visitor as Thornton came forward with a poor effort at concealing his self-consciousness, "when it might just as well be in rubies and diamonds; and will be, my dear boy, if you display the practical sense which people have—*heretofore*—attributed to you!"

Rosie slipped out and ensconced herself ready for duty in a broad cushioned seat under a bit of old stained-glass which Thornton, in order to give light to the entry, had fitted into the upper part of a door-frame formerly used as an entrance to his library.

"Let 's go in here for a chat," cried Mrs. Parkinson, suddenly leaving the portrait and luring his steps toward the alcove. "I am

awfully early; but I was fearful of being side-tracked if I left the neighborhood."

It was Rosie's good fortune that they seated themselves on a broad, deep sofa from which she was separated by only the thin antique glass.

"Oh, Reg! Reg!" Mrs. Parkinson continued in her tormenting voice. "The town is one huge laugh over that thing in *The Social Shotgun* this morning. Nothing truer was ever perpetrated by that vile sheet; for I was in Mrs. Hampton-Yorke's box and witnessed the whole side-show myself. To think of it—the *model* young man—the *pet* of the *mammas*—angled for more than any man in New York—billions pitched into your lap—and you allow yourself to be—given away like that in public by old Rosie! Really it is most compromising to sit alone with you."

"Do you mind?" laughed Thornton, trying to accept the inevitable chaffing as gracefully as possible.

"On the contrary! Really, I have become a regular Bohemian within a week's time. Stella invites me to her dressing-room at the

opera; and yesterday, I was at her luncheon for di Biancho. She put me next to their impresario. Why, I can't imagine; but he was *most entertaining!* He told me that operatic husbands caused him more 'diabolical trouble' and 'cussed annoyance' than his entire personnel and the running of the opera-house combined. He declared he would rather see the Plague walk in at his office door; and each morning he prayed that he might be spared from killing a prima-donna's husband before nightfall. By the way: I asked him about Vidalli. He said she sang 'nicely.' Those managers are shrewd. They fear a barely *kind* word will send an artist's price up. However, the consensus of opinion was that Vidalli is *much* overrated.

"How could Madame Stella's guests—with courtesy—decide otherwise?"

"Naturally! But one thing is certain: all our women are becoming skeptical about her steel-armoured virtue. People don't harp on things they've always possessed; nor does it do for a young and attractive woman to work on the susceptibilities of too *many men.* The

mere fact lends credence to that chorus-girl story."

"What is that?" inquired Thornton, his voice trembling with indignation.

"They say she once sang in the Casino chorus."

"Never! It was a Methodist chorus!"

"Oh, well; it 's all the same thing! People mix things so!"

"Purposely!"

"Now don't get silly just because you 've been flirting a bit. We all do that. You hear but one side of the story. People in the operatic world have better information. Stella *knows* that Vidalli was hissed in Italy by an indignant public because she had possessed herself of the manager and driven out their favourite singer: and—as for her stepfather—she never heard of him until they met the day after her arrival and went to that French—boarding-house!"

"Lies! *Lies*—every one of them! Somebody will answer dearly for them!" Thornton sprang angrily to his feet and began to pace up and down.

"To whom?" inquired Mrs. Parkinson, with unusual distinctness.

"To———!" The answer died on his lips.

Mrs. Parkinson laughed merrily and carried her cruel torture to the finish. "What a splendid operatic husband you would make. It is a questionable happiness, though, dear Reg. They say Paleska's husband has never seen her in opera since they were married. He is so absurdly jealous he can't bear to see another man's arms around her—even on the stage. Is n't he foolish? Pleasant life for a man whose wife sings twice a week in opera! Is it not? He had an excellent business, too: but was forced to give it up to look out for her greater interests—and *lives on her money.* Such a neat way to blend a man's talents and—his *pride.*"

An abrupt whirr from the entry-bell almost ended Rosie's life, so deeply absorbed was she in the conversation. She sat pressing her hands over her heart, as Fritz answered the second call and admitted Miss Driscoll.

"My Lawd, honey," mumbled the old mammy scrambling to her feet, "yoh landed

like a earthquake. De elevateh mos' gin'rally tells us when folks is comin'; but dis time—Uh!"

"I tell you what it is, Rosie," exclaimed the artist irrelevantly and in a state of blind agitation, "I have n't been so excited since the day I was graduated from the High School."

"Neveh mind—neveh mind," replied old Rosie with great mystery in glance and gesture. "Dey is uddehs whuts de same way; an' dey won't see yohs. So jes' make yohself *ca'm*, Miss. Folks says only de good things befoh yoh face, anyway: so yoh is n't goin' to fine out whut dey really thinks, 'ceptin' when dey axes yoh to paint 'em, too."

"Oh, do you believe they will?"

"Co'se. I done tole 'em all 'bout yoh."

"Oh, Rosie! How good of you!"

"Tell yoh whut 't is, chile; ef yoh 'll set dere in de dinin'-room—on dat cheer—dey won't know who yoh is: an' den yoh 'll heah de troof, shuh!"

As Rosie drew the door back just in time to forestall another shock from the electric bell, Mrs. Hampton-Yorke sailed magnificently through into the drawing-room. Raising her

lorgnettes, she stopped before the easel. "Splendid! A perfect likeness! Now there is some comfort in offering posterity a thing that does n't lie. I have been painted by a half-dozen celebrated artists and exhibited in the Salon: but not a living creature would have recognised me if I had n't been *labelled.* Who is the artist?"

Rosie called Thornton's attention to Miss Driscoll.

"Ah, here she is," he said, bringing her forward.

"So young, too!" Mrs. Hampton-Yorke extended her hand. "Why, my dear, you have positive genius. What do you ask for your portraits?"

"Three hundred dollars," answered Thornton for her, thinking the two hundred he had sent her that morning a niggardly sum for such meritorious work.

Mrs. Hampton-Yorke smiled approvingly. "I 'll give you an order now, if you have time for me. I can sit Tuesdays and Thursdays at eleven."

The modest little artist welcomed the gen-

eral confusion caused by a series of arrivals, for she had never before encountered such a company of gay worldlings, nor had she had reason to cherish anything more than the memory of faint praise from the shopman who purchased her "pot-boilers."

Concealed by the portière, Rosie was following every phase of Miss Driscoll's triumph when near-by voices startled her.

"Where is that Gibraltar of virtue? She just about lives here, I hear."

"Whom do you mean?" inquired Mrs. Hampton-Yorke severely.

"Vidalli," answered Mrs. Parkinson.

"Do be careful, Anna; you have blackguarded that poor girl so persistently since last Thursday that your enemies accuse you of ulterior motives."

"How absurd! What motive could I have in persecuting Vidalli?"

Mrs. Hampton-Yorke found it unnecessary to reply: for, at that moment, Fritz held the portière aside and admitted Miss Vidalli and Hugh Melrose.

Rosie could distinguish nothing more in the

hum of general conversation, although two shadows on the antique window betokened an impending tête-à-tête within her hearing. "Fritz," she whispered excitedly, "I 'll open de doh, ef yoh 'll staht de watch b'ilin' fur de tea. I 's busy heah."

The valet grinned knowingly at this unspoken promise of sweetmeats, and the old mammy abruptly retired into her corner, just as Mrs. Hampton-Yorke was saying with perceptible annoyance: "What ever possessed you to come with him?"

"I could n't avoid it," replied Miss Vidalli, evidently likewise vexed. "I was saying goodbye to his wife and niece at Mrs. Henshaw's when he came up and asked them to leave, also; but they wished to hear Nitroni sing once more: and although I tried to escape, he overtook me at the door and simply said he would walk here with me."

"Don't do it again under any circumstances. I can advise you intelligently, as I know the *private life* of every man in New York. Hugh Melrose can compromise you more than all the others put together; for, by this time,

every one has heard of your quest of money that you may return to opera: and liberality to his *harem* is one of his virtues!" At his age a man cares little for the cost, if he get what he wants; and billionaire trust directors usually want the moon and stars and a noonday sun or two thrown in—there is so little else of which they go short."

"I wonder if *he* considers it right?" interposed Miss Vidalli.

"'Might is right,' is his motto," was the answer; "and not the Czar, Emperor William and King Edward, triple-handed, could make him yield one iota. You can hardly blame him. I know many worse men. His vast wealth makes him the prey—a willing prey at times—of unscrupulous women who have *positions to maintain.* My dear, it really wounds me to say this; but I am an old woman: you are young, beautiful, a stranger and unchaperoned. Every glance at you is an interrogation. Make your position clear before your natural enemies can assail it. They have already pounced upon Hugh Melrose's devotion to you wherever you have sung."

"And I have kept him at arm's-length!"

"They don't know that; which behooves you to be all the more discreet. *His* desire is the thing society considers: when some one remarked yesterday at a woman's-luncheon that the one way to secure the mighty Melrose for a social function was to announce that you would sing, a half-dozen women were visibly moved. Have you booked any engagements since yesterday?"

"Four. At Mrs. Van Silts——"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Williamson's——"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Carstairs——"

"Yes."

"And Mrs. Algernon Brown's."

"Yes; all *four* at that luncheon!"

"This gossip," replied Miss Vidalli with spirit, "is all on the surface: and in whatever guise it appear, I am convinced that it is the work of one person—a person with a clearly defined motive."

"Undoubtedly."

"I am told she roasts society surreptitiously in the *Shotgun*.

"Another source of revenue," said Mrs. Hampton-Yorke; "but more particularly a ruse to keep herself out of print: so you can imagine we don't dare leave her out of anything—excepting intimate gatherings—or, our reputations would suffer more than by association. Thus, we live—terrorized!"

"She has become suddenly intimate with Stella, I hear?"

"Yes."

"Which accounts for my inability to get an engagement at one of the Sunday evening concerts."

"My dear," said Mrs. Hampton-Yorke kindly, "the example of a good life and a great artistic career will dispel every cloud on your horizon to-day."

"Then what would you do at present?"

"Stick my head in the air and tell the gossips to go to the Devil!"

The company had all assembled, including Mrs. and Miss Melrose, and Dick Wynne, who was constantly hovering over them since

Thornton's devotion to Miss Vidalli had become common gossip.

This new order of things lay like lead on the poor old darkey's faithful heart as she and Fritz dispensed the hospitality which once had been her greatest joy. The twinkle in each friendly eye was, to her, a mere reminder of the humiliating exposure in *The Social Shotgun.* Overjoyed to get her liberty at last, she resorted to her dark nook in the entry to hide her mortification. Fate seemed to have led her there, for out of the library came the sound of subdued voices.

" 'There 's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip!' " said Mrs. Parkinson. "When they were constantly together at Newport, last summer, I was sure he would prove to be Virginia's fate. It 's a pity, too; for she likes him; and —there are so many lovely 'bounders' floating about, one never knows what may happen."

"Oh, Virginia has plenty of time," mumbled Mr. Melrose.

"Nevertheless, you would like to have a hand in the selection of her husband, would n't you?"

"Ye—es."

"And you don't know a worthier young fellow than Reg, do you?"

"Gawd bless yoh fur dat, Madam," interpolated Rosie fervently to herself. "I 'll neveh call yoh a cat no moh!"

"No—o," replied Mr. Melrose, "I can't say I do."

"Then it is a pity to let this *adventuress* ruin their two lives."

"Oh, no! It is n't as bad as that."

"You never believe me when I tell you anything! And how many times have you had to admit that it was just as I had predicted?"

"That is so," replied Mr. Melrose, laughing indulgently.

"Mark my word—she does n't care a snap of her finger for Reg. She is using him as a catspaw: and when she has her chestnuts, she will toss *him* into the fire and let him sizzle. She ought to be *sent off*! She told me five thousand dollars would last her two years in Italy."

"She will soon earn that amount here."

"Never. A half-dozen times more will finish

her. New York will seek another toy. I am sure Mrs. Melrose would send Vidalli back if you desired it: philanthropy—the advancement of art—anything is excuse enough to propose it."

Rosie heard no more. Some departing guests were quickly followed by others—among them Miss Melrose, who whispered that she and her uncle had given orders to Miss Driscoll for portraits—until only two couples remained visible. Mrs. Hampton-Yorke and Mrs. Parkinson had their heads together over the tea-table in the dining-room, whilst Miss Driscoll and Mr. Rainey, who had been urged by Thornton to come in and meet his step-daughter's friends, were talking about art in the drawing-room. Quick as thought, Rosie turned toward her post in the entry to hearken to Thornton and Miss Vidalli in earnest conversation in the library.

"Nine engagements still to fill," Thornton was saying, as his black guardian shifted to a more favourable position for hearing their subdued voices. "When is the last?"

"January nineteenth, at Mrs. Algernon Brown's," responded Miss Vidalli.

"Don't accept any more."

"I *must!* I must return to Italy!"

"*Don't* return to Italy." Thornton's voice was almost inaudible. Rosie tore away the cushions and, resting on her knees, held her ear against the opaque glass.

I *must*," was the faltering reply, "I have my career to think of."

"Give up your career."

Two shadows which had slowly merged into one on the glass, divided abruptly, the space widening between them as the singer gasped: "Give up my career? Never! My artistic and my private life must first give the lie to that wicked, intriguing woman!"

"Mrs. Parkinson?"

"Yes."

"What have you heard?"

"Everything."

"Give me the right to answer her." Thornton's shadow moved nearer.

"I can't," replied Miss Vidalli, maintaining

her position; "a woman must answer for herself."

"Your *husband* can answer for you."

The ensuing pause was so long that Rosie buried her face in the cushioned back of the seat to suppress a cry of rage and anguish.

"Vida," he whispered, "you know I love you. Do I need tell you?"

"No," she murmured. "No."

"I loved you the first moment I saw you."

"Please don't," she entreated softly. "You have known me but a week."

"I have waited for you all my life. Why should I not speak now? My home is ready for you. Will you come to it—my wife?"

Her shadow moved away from his in the silence of a pause.

"Can you not care for me enough?" he inquired beseechingly.

"A woman *must* care for a man as devoted—tender—and noble as you," she answered, gaining assurance as she spoke; "but marriage is not for us."

"Why not?"

"I am an artist."

"And I love you."

"Oh, don't! I entreat you!" she implored with unmistakable pain in her voice. "One requires time to consider so serious a step."

Thornton took her hand in his, pressed it to his lips and held it to his cheek in an ecstasy of emotion.

"I must go," she whispered timorously, rising abruptly as if fearing to trust herself further. "Those ladies will wonder at our absence."

"I may come to you—for dinner?" he entreated, yet with a conscious ring of triumph.

"Of course," she faltered with a tell-tale catch in her voice, as if wondering that he should consider it necessary to ask the question.

Rosie hid her face in the cushions in dumb despair, blind to her environment until Fritz plucked her sleeve to remind her that the guests were leaving.

"Thank Gawd!" she said dully, crossing herself. "Thank Gawd! De masteh 's goin' out to dinneh. Yoh can eat up eberything, an' take de rest to yoh Ma. I 's goin' to bed."

CHAPTER XI.

ROSIE AT THE MAISON LEROUX.

1. The Poker Party.
2. A Full House.
3. A Royal Flush.

"Is dis a French bohdin'-house?" she asked with all her winsome Southern grace.

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"An' is dey a singin'-lady wid a funny name like Dalalli a-livin' heah?" she added.

CHAPTER XI.

ROSIE AT THE MAISON LEROUX

I.—The Poker Party.

"Jack pot to open. Put up!"—Madame Leroux.

Spiritually and physically Rosie was a wreck. Neither the rich gifts of friends at Christmas, nor the solicitous kindness of Thornton, seemed to more than momentarily lighten the shadow deepening around her. She acquired a cough and took to "mis'ry" as a theme for daily variations whereupon to build; but as to the actual cause of her decline—never so much as a hint!

Her pride had been woefully lacerated by Thornton's proposal to Miss Vidalli, and her versatile wit benumbed as in the dark days on Seventh Avenue. In her humiliation, she altogether ceased her visits to the Melrose

and Hampton-Yorke mansions. She considered the present a purgatory—a horrible lapse between a stoppage of time and the reopening of the future as defined by the date of Miss Vidalli's last New York engagement, January the nineteenth. In truth, she would have resigned hope altogether but for her faith in the insidious workings of Mrs. Parkinson's venom and in that same lady's influence over Hugh Melrose: for, Thornton, Rosie considered, was too hopelessly blinded by the prima-donna's magic spell to be rescued by any ordinary means. She had accustomed herself to look upon the union of Thornton and Virginia as the excuse for her existence and—like the paid up transaction with the undertaker—the price of her ticket to Paradise. Now she saw her ambition thwarted, her fondest wish unfulfilled, and her home desecrated and bemeaned.

Friday, the twentieth of January, dawned like Easter for Rosie. She wondered, in saying her beads, if lilies or wax flowers would typify her hopes ere the break of another day; for she had resolved to beard the lion in his den

and forecast the future. Yes; that very day she would pay a visit to Miss Vidalli, carrying with her as a propitiatory offering, a delicately concocted "Sally-Lunn," and relying upon her own ready wit for guidance and self-protection.

Thornton dressed early for the evening and departed, according to a recent custom, without mentioning his destination. In fact, he had not dined at home since the holidays. Rosie followed him as quickly as she could don her wrap, and, boarding a Sixth Avenue car, made the journey to Thirty-fifth Street. She knew vaguely that Miss Vidalli lived there and determined to inquire at every door, as far as Fifth Avenue, until she found her. Slowly working her way past dwellings which had been remodelled for business purposes, the dim-eyed old mammy ascended to the first house which looked like a residence and rang the bell.

A flood of light suddenly illuminated her dusky face. "Is dis a French bohdin'-house?" she asked with all her winsome Southern grace.

Rosie was black; she was accustomed to cruel taunts and rebuffs; yet, when the door slammed in her face and she was suddenly left in darkness, a cry for the Evil One's assistance rose involuntarily to her lips. Then she smiled blandly. The man who slammed the door had shattered the glass in the upper half of it. "Yoh loss and *my luck*!" she said aloud. "Dey is n't nothin' whut 's luckier-makin' dan breakin' glass, 'ceptin' lookin'-glasses, an' I guess yoh won't want 'o look in yourn much befoh dis is paid fur!"

It was a full half-hour before her stereotyped question met an affirmative response. "An' is dey a singin'-lady wid a funny name like Dalalli a-livin' heah?" she added.

"Sure," said the boy, admitting her to a square entrance hall; "but she 's at dinner."

"Wid 'er step-faddeh an' a—young man?"

"Sure!"

"Well—when she comes out, yoh can *whisper* to 'er dat 'Rosie' wants to see 'er. Can't yoh?"

"Sure!"

"Now whur can yoh stick me out o' de way,

sonny, tell she 's ready. Any whur 'll do. I can go in de ketchen, or set behine a doh."

"Come in here," said the boy, leading her through a doorway which had been cut in the wall by Papa Leroux when he acquired the neighbouring house as an adjunct to his *pension*. "No one comes through here. They go out of the dining-room by the other hall."

The long salon of the Maison Leroux served various purposes. Divided at the centre by a heavy curtain depending from the ceiling, the front section became a general reception-room, and the rear half the private parlour of the proprietor and his worthy helpmate. Here they shut themselves in with heavy screens on two sides in order to convert the outlying portion into a combination waiting-room and passage way between the houses. Access to this enclosure was on the long side facing an old-fashioned archway which led to the main corridor of the house. Someone was entering there as Rosie seated herself in the narrow waiting-room, and although she could not see, she heard distinctly enough to follow all that was taking place.

"Good evening, Doctor!" cried an aged voice.

"Good-evening, Madame Marceau!"

"Playing solitaire?"

"Could it be anything else, when I am alone?"

"Ugh!" Madame Marceau ejaculated in disgust. "Always grumpy; you *hoodoo* me, anyway; opposite, is near enough to you!"

"Hello! I 'm here!" cried another arrival in fresh, ringing tones as she closed the screen behind her.

"Good-evening, Doctor!" she shouted in his ear.

"Good-evening, Madame Topeka!"

"What have you in that reticule?" inquired Madame Marceau. "Your night clothes?"

"Sandwiches," replied Madame Topeka, thumping her bag down on the table. "Thought I 'd put Madame Leroux to shame."

"Impossible!"

"I 'll have the satisfaction of making her mad, anyway. Her stinginess is disgraceful. Here we sit, night after night, week after week, and she taking five cents out of every jack pot. Ask her why she does it, and she

says: 'The cards; the lights; the room!' Phew! As long as I have played here, I've never had as much as a piece of bread and butter or a drink of whisky that one of the players did n't sign for. It 's outrageous! Why at Madame Bertram's, the buffet is set with all that they want to eat and drink every evening before they begin to play. It 's a fifty-cent limit, too:—*real* poker. You can't bluff on a quarter limit."

"Say, Doctor," she shouted, "we 're going to have supper to-night."

"I 'll bet the Lerouxs don't furnish it."

"Half of it, anyway. When old Leroux was tipsy the other night, he promised me a bottle of whisky on my birthday. His wife overheard it and nearly had apoplexy; but he was too drunk to catch her eye. I played poker with my woman's club this afternoon and got no dinner; so I brought it with me and mean to fool the Lerouxs out of a bottle."

"You won't if she gets on to it."

"She 's the closest woman on earth," cried Madame Topeka, evidently indifferent to who overheard. "She made four thousand dollars

out of poker last year. I tell you I would n't give any more singin' lessons if they 'd let me keep the 'kitty.' Well, I don't; so here 's three times 'round for luck."

Madame Marceau and the Doctor laughed as the singing-teacher trudged patiently in a circle before inverting her chair to perfect the charm and replace it with a bang on the floor.

The rattling of poker-chips was punctuated by Madame Topeka's voice: "Mine are all here. I wonder who is playing to-night?"

"There 's the bride's voice now," replied Madame Marceau. "I hope she did n't bring *him*. He 's a regular adventurer. Madame Leroux tried to stop the marriage; but Foulon claimed to be 'sixteen' in her feelings and—undertook his support."

"How old is she?"

"Sixty-five!"

"Well! She 's a wonder! How many husbands has her dressmaking supported?"

"Four—if you count Le Baron: but—that was forty years ago."

"Hello, children!" A peculiar foreign voice accompanied the creaking of the screen-panel.

"Hello, Madame!" responded Madame Topeka gaily. "How young you look; you 're not a day over twenty-five!"

"Zat 's pecause I 'm so habby."

"Happy? Oh no! How long have you been married?"

"Fifty," said Madame Marceau.

"She vas n't ask you how long you been married, Madame," exclaimed the bride spitefully.

"I was counting my chips," replied Madame Marceau in a hard voice.

Madame Foulon, having administered her rebuke, murmured a gentle answer: "Five tays."

"Ah, you little turtle dove! I wish I had somebody to coo to me," observed Madame Topeka.

"Coo? Coo? Coo?" sighed a masculine voice outside the screen. The entrance panel creaked audibly above Madame Topeka's delighted cry:

"Just look at that old humbug! You 're foolin', Leroux! You know you are! You don't love me a bit!"

"Don't I? Don't I?"

"Oh, Lawd! Ain't it cunnin'? It knows it 's my birthday; does n't it? Does it remember what it promised me? Now don't look over your shoulder. *She* is n't there!"

"Yes," whispered Leroux.

"Then run quick and get it before she comes. I 'll tell her I brought it with me. Don't lose time throwin' kisses; I 'll give you a real one if you 'll get back before she does."

The two Frenchwomen laughed, but Madame Topeka spoke seriously as the screen closed behind Monsieur Leroux: "I hope they 'll begin early to-night."

"It 's only half-past seven," said Madame Marceau.

"I know, but the Doctor always quits at one o'clock. Makes me sick. Does n't give you time to get your money back if you sit in bad luck."

"He 'll go anyway, if he lose two stacks, no matter how much he has won the night before."

"He 's a stinchy ole man!" Madame Foulon declared.

The Doctor cleared his throat in protest and drew his foot heavily over the carpet.

"Look out," said Madame Topeka softly. "He *never* hears when you want him to. Guess it 's the timbre of your voice, Madame. Even deaf men can't resist it."

"You silly girl," simpered the bride.

"Oui, *ma chérie—ma belle fille,*" rose strong, self-reliant tones in the archway.

"The Devil!" muttered Madame Topeka. "I knew the old man would get caught."

"Good-evening, Madame Leroux," she added, as Madame Foulon contributed a *bon soir;* and the mistress of the house settled herself at the table.

"*Ma mignonne,*" continued Madame Leroux, as a toy dog barked importunately. "Run over the table, Ninette, and bring Mamma luck."

"Well," ejaculated Madame Marceau, "I 've lost steadily for a week. If I don't have luck to-night, I 'll stop playing poker."

"For a whole night," laughed Madame Leroux. "Here; this is a rare favour, as you know: you may touch my hangman's-rope!"

"Hangman's-rope?" inquired Madame Topeka.

"Certainly. It was taken from the noose that strangled a criminal in Rome."

"Is that a charm?"

"The very luckiest you can possess. A friend of mine paid the hangman two *lire* for these few threads; and he said people fairly fought for only a wisp, it is held in such esteem."

"Le' me touch it, too!" Madame Topeka's request was spoken more in earnest than in jest.

Rosie started up excitedly to participate in the distribution of luck, and was turning the corner of the screen without thought of her rash action, when an old man, hugging a bottle under his arm, came toward her through the archway. She drew back unseen as he grasped a screen-panel and let himself into the poker-room.

"Oh, thank you Leroux!" exclaimed Madame Topeka feigning surprise. "I set that bottle down in the hall when I was talking to Madame La Farge and clean forgot it! I was playing cards at Mrs. Miller's this afternoon, and she

gave me this as I had to go without dinner to get here."

"How singular!" remarked Madame Leroux sarcastically. "Our special brand!"

"Yes," retorted Madame Topeka; "I told her how *rare* it was—that any one stood treat. That 's why she got it!"

"Leroux," cried his spouse angrily, "take your place! The chips are all right—in each pocket. I counted them before dinner. Money!"

"Dr. Wyckoff—five dollars; Madame Foulon—five dollars; Madame Marceau—five dollars; Madame Topeka—five dollars; Monsieur Leroux—five dollars: and Madame Leroux—five dollars. Jack pot to open! Put up!"

The dog yelped as the chips rained upon the table.

"Viens, Ninette!" called Mamma Leroux. "Tais-toi!" A gentle chastisement was greeted by a surprised yawp; the same deft hand shot the cards around the table: and the game had begun.

II.—A Full House.

"What had you?" shouted Madame Marceau. "What had you?"

"Jags up!" yelled the landlord in a rage.

"Qu' est-ce que c'est que ces manières la?" yelled his spouse in reproof.

* * * * * * * * * * *

"Stop! Show your hand! That is no way to play!"

Rosie glanced curiously about, and was venturing to enter the principal corridor when a door at the farther end gave a warning click and a servant dashed past the archway.

The heavy curtains closing the end of the improvised passage way seemed a safer goal; but upon pulling the loose end aside, she barely saved herself from a sprawling entrance into the reception room, in her surprise at sight of Mrs. Melrose resplendent in a brocaded opera-cloak and dazzling tiara. Mrs. Melrose was leaning over a table examining a book of prints, so near that Rosie could have put out her hand and touched her; Virginia was

seated near a front window. Fearing to attract attention, Rosie held her breath as she heard Madame Topeka inquiring in a resonant voice for Mr. Rainey.

"He 's in the dining-room with his step-daughter and her young man," replied Madame Leroux.

"Thornton?"

"Well, you could hardly call the only other man who comes to see her, *young*."

"Oh, ho! So that 's the way the wind blows, is it? What 's his name?"

"Hugh Melrose."

Rosie observed that Mrs. Melrose's eyes were no longer studying the book; but Virginia seemed not to hear.

"Hugh Melrose?" Madame Topeka gave a long, low whistle. "Well, she 's in luck. So that 's the origin of her fine feathers. I thought there was a nigger in the wood-pile somewhere!"

"Oh, no!" said Madame Leroux hastily. "She 's a good girl. She never sees him alone."

"Then she 's a fool!" said Madame Topeka. "Why he gave Fannie Lister a gorgeous house

in Eighty-sixth Street. She had her own carriage, two men in the dining-room, and six months abroad every year. I wish he 'd try to see me alone. I 'd jump at him so quick he 'd see stars!"

"Mademoiselle Vidalli may have her reasons —at present," observed Madame Leroux. "I think she 's trying to catch Thornton. A marriage in that set would be so much better for her career."

"That is n't so easy. Half the girls in New York are trying to catch Thornton. He'll scoop their millions and she—the *old man.*"

"How sweet of you!" cried Miss Vidalli sweeping into the reception-room with both hands extended. "You look pale," she added, with her searching eyes on Mrs. Melrose.

"It is nothing new." Mrs. Melrose spoke with a double meaning which Rosie understood.

"Let me send for a glass of cognac or something strengthening," urged the singer solicitously.

"Nothing, thanks!" replied Mrs. Melrose as they sank into chairs near Virginia. "We

have run in for only a moment, on our way to the opera, to say *au revoir.*"

"Aunt Annie might add," laughed Virginia, "that we, also, came early because we wish to say we have heard *one* overture this season."

"I particularly love the Vorspiel to 'Lohengrin,' which they are giving to-night," said Mrs. Melrose. "We are off to-morrow, quite unexpectedly, for Palm Beach and Nassau, to remain a month or more, and feared you might leave before our return."

"I have no plans, and—" Miss Vidalli added disconsolately, "no engagements."

"They will come," said Virginia.

"If they do not," interposed Mrs. Melrose hastily, as if making an unpremeditated resolve, "let *me* know. You must have your two years in Italy—somehow. Good-bye, my child," she added, rising abruptly and regarding Miss Vidalli as if uncertain what to say next. "Write me, as soon as you have anything to tell me. Come Virginia, we must hasten!"

Rosie drew back, seeing them face toward her, and as they passed into the corridor she

heard Papa Leroux cry lustily, "Ah, ha! Mine!"

An avalanche of chips rattled in a table pocket whilst the players raised an uproar. "Stop! Show your hand! That's no way to play!"

"It's mine!" shouted Leroux resentfully.

"Nobody doubts you, you sweet sing!" said Madame Topeka soothingly. "Only you *must* show your hand before you take the pot."

"Sweet sing!" sneered the landlady contemptuously. "Yes; if I had known how *sweet* he was, I never would have married him."

"What had you?" shouted Madame Marceau. "What had you?"

"*Jags up!*" yelled the landlord in a rage.

"*Qu' est-ce que c'est que ces manières la?*" yelled his spouse in reproof.

Ninette, thinking the admonition too personal, yawped pathetically.

"*Oui, ma belle fille; ma chérie!*" murmured her mistress caressingly, as Madame Marceau indignantly proclaimed her opinion of Leroux.

"Brute! You act like a pig!"

"Right you are, Madame! Right! The

prize pig!" said Madame Leroux, tapping the table in approval.

Inarticulate mutterings from the angry landlord set the party into a gale of discordant laughter.

"Say, Leroux," cried Madame Topeka, "I 'm dying of thirst. Open that bottle and pass a cheering drop."

"The stingiest people I ever knew!" said some one in the reception-room. "They begrudge us a penny-worth of electricity to finish our cigars in peace."

Rosie cautiously drew the curtain aside and espied Mr. Rainey and Thornton standing under the chandelier.

"More likely they want you in the game," suggested Thornton.

"Of course; that much more money in the jack pot. Shrewd old cat that. Shall we look in on them?"

"I 'll wait here for Miss Vidalli."

"Only for a minute," urged Rainey, leading him to the curtain-end farthest from Rosie. "You 'll hear Vida come in."

The old darkey, oblivious to the danger of

detection, immediately sought the corner where the screen joined the curtain, and gained a full view of the poker-room.

"Just in time, Rainey," called Madame Topeka, waving a glass of amber liquid before his eyes.

"Whisky?" he cried, snatching up the bottle and filling a small glass. "Whisky? Is it a dream?"

"It will be, unless you are more sparing."

Thornton declined a glass when offered to him, and Rainey, commanding the table, cried: "Here's to the mellowing influence which enables us to meet our losses and gains with equal fortitude!"

"Are you in the jack pot?" inquired Madame Leroux as the glasses were drained in unison.

"Certainly!" he replied, at an affirmative nod from his guest. "Somebody throw me in a blue chip."

Thornton sank into a chair by the curtain, where he could hear the conversation in both rooms.

Rosie turned away with the purpose of inquiring again for Miss Vidalli, when a slight

noise at the front door and the rustle of silken skirts furnished excuse for one more survey of the outer room.

Alone there in the full light of the chandelier stood Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, her opera-cloak thrown open and her head, neck and corsage blazing with magnificent jewels. An expectant smile flitted across her face as the outer door closed again and a moment later Dick Wynne appeared in the archway with a cheery greeting.

"You are a nice man," she exclaimed in mock severity, "to keep a lady waiting a half-hour at a rendezvous!"

"I am flattered that it seemed so long to you," said Dick, lifting her gloved hand to his lips. "I saw you going up the steps when I was half way down the block."

Mrs. Hampton-Yorke laughed and tapped him on the shoulder with her fan. "I hope Vida won't keep us waiting, anyway; I haven't seen a first act in years. In fact I see no reason for giving it at all. No one is ever there to hear it. They might just as well save

themselves for the second act and begin at nine o'clock. Where have you come from?"

"The Club. Hugh Melrose was dining there, also, and offered to drive me down."

"Where was he going? To the opera?"

"He did n't say; but I strongly suspect he 's driving around town to gather up his pajamas. He 's off for Europe in the morning!"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Dick, as Mrs. Hampton-Yorke succumbed to laughter. "I promised not to tell—don't breathe it to a soul—will you? He sails by the 'Landgraf' at half-past five on a secret mission and does n't want the newspapers to get hold of it."

"A secret mission?" repeated Mrs. Hampton-Yorke quizzically. "I wonder which one of his harem accompanies him?"

"This is an unexpected pleasure!" exclaimed Miss Vidalli, entering the room and breaking abruptly into their badinage.

"A brief one, my dear," Mrs. Hampton-Yorke observed. "I decided only this afternoon to go with the Melroses in their private car to Palm Beach in the morning and came in for a second, fearing you might be off before my return; but

I thought I never would get here! Yesterday, I remarked in Anna Parkinson's presence that young Jack Leigh was coming in for tea this afternoon. What did she do but invite herself, come early and stay late; for she was crazy to meet him and affix him to her list of adorers. You see, his people have a place in Scotland, and she is taking Parkinson there for the shooting in August, if a merciful Providence does n't claim him in the meanwhile."

"Perhaps she has hopes of some one taking him for a deer!" suggested Miss Vidalli.

"Because of his horns?" inquired Dick quickly.

"He 'd be the patriarch of any flock!" cried Mrs. Hampton-Yorke appreciatively. "That woman! She would take the blue ribbon at the Westchester Fair!"

"She is utterly without conscience," declared Dick with mock gravity.

"Conscience?" said Mrs. Hampton-Yorke. "Anna Parkinson without conscience? Indeed you are mistaken; she has one in perfect order; good as new; never been used!"

"Come, Dick!" she added, rising abruptly.

"The Cooper twins will never forgive me. They are sitting in the back of my box waiting for me."

"Now, my dear," she said, as the trio passed into the corridor, "drop me a line that we may keep in touch."

The outer door clicked and Miss Vidalli stepped immediately into the broad archway, a new and tender light in her lovely eyes as she smiled expectantly at some one standing under the chandelier.

III.—A Royal Flush.

"I fear I am very plebeian. I like people for what they are; not for what birth or fortune has made them. The true aristocrats are those who naturally gravitate to the noble in thought and deed, and to whom money is merely a fitting adjunct."—Vida Vidalli.

It was Thornton, his face eloquent with the pent-up longing of a lifetime that now rose from his heart and suffused his very being, revealing the undivided, unchanging

affection of a generous, proud, honest nature that knew how to value and cherish a love as great as its own. With apparent understanding and appreciation of the blessed fortune awaiting her, the beautiful singer walked straight into his outstretched arms and silently pressed her cheek to his. No words were spoken: speech were sacrilege in that perfect union of souls. They both loved as men and women love but once in life—no matter what later joys may bring. The faint sound of descending footsteps without admonished the lovers of caution; some one passed the door and out into the street.

To Rosie, overcome by the stirring scene she had just witnessed, everything disappeared in darkness. Then she took courage and looked again.

In front of her, where she could have touched Thornton without moving a step forward, he and Vida had seated themselves on a narrow sofa in the shadow thrown by the wing of the open door.

"Sweetheart!" he murmured softly as he gazed into her love-filled eyes; and by the

ease with which, the next moment, he changed the subject, Rosie knew that the kiss under the chandelier had not been their first.

"So the Melroses are going to Palm Beach?"

"I fancy on account of Mrs. Melrose. She looked pale and haggard, dear woman!"

"The New York pace! Nowhere in the world does one work as hard and get so little in return."

"You are beginning to realise that?"

"Only since I have known such moments with you," he said, tenderly embracing her.

"Don't," she whispered, gently releasing herself. "Some one might come in." Yet she pressed his hand to her cheek before she let it go.

"Occupation keeps women happy," she continued. "Mere social engagements tend to demoralise. One should live for a higher, nobler purpose."

"Many in our world do."

"Yes," said Miss Vidalli thoughtfully, "so many that it is unfair to include them with those who set the pace for society and give it the tone which offends people of refined and

intellectual tastes. And yet, the mere thought of being of it—anchored to it for life, as it were, is a sort of spiritual death for the work-lover. I fear I am very plebeian. I like people for what they are; not for what birth or fortune has made them. The true aristocrats are those who naturally gravitate to the noble in thought and deed, and to whom money is merely a fitting adjunct. They, somehow, are one with art and fill my heart. Even dear old Scrub Oak had its gentle folk.

"Without an accent, too!" she added with a roguish smile.

Thornton gathered her, unprotesting, in his arms and held her cheek to his.

"Yes," she murmured happily, "they creep into my thoughts sometimes—when I see a group of diamond-tiara'd and pearl-roped beauties laughing at the tipsy efforts of another dinner guest to balance a loose-tongued Chinese idol on his knee instead of listening to the inspired voice of Madame Stella; or, when Mrs. Jerome Mason plants herself, with her best young man and any others she can corral, just outside the music-

room door and makes more noise than the accompaniments to the songs. The dear Melroses and Mrs. Hampton-Yorke don't permit such antics in their houses. How I shall miss them!"

"They will soon return."

"I may be gone."

"Gone?" said Thornton, drawing away to look her full in the eyes.

"To Italy."

"Oh, Vida! You are jesting!"

"I am not," she replied; and taking his head in both her hands she kissed him again and again on the brow.

"Would you leave me?"

"I will return to you."

"But my home is ready for you *now*!"

"Now and forever, I hope."

"Then how can you leave it?"

"My career claims me part of the time."

"No! I claim you *all the time!*"

"I may not be a genius," replied the singer gravely, "yet Nature has gifted me with something which is just as much the property of the world—for which it was originally created and

intended. It is not in my power to bestow it upon one man." She smiled and caught his face again in her hands. "Be stoical; and let us be happy when we may. Life is not all roses and sunshine."

"That is why I want you always with me, to protect you from the evil in it."

"You are thinking of Mrs. Parkinson. Is any wife in her set more proof against her malice than I am now—should she choose to transfer it?"

"Not that alone. There is the life of the theatre."

"Which is like any other profession. I go to rehearsal; do my part; and leave. I don't make it a social function—*ever*."

"Yet the life has all the intimacy of—social acquaintances."

Miss Vidalli laughed and looked mischievous. "You are jealous, Reg!"

"How can I help it?"

"Of whom?"

"Whom but your operatic sweethearts?"

"Those garlicky, beery creatures?" exclaimed Miss Vidalli in unfeigned disgust.

"Some are gentlemen."

"Who prefer being courted—to courting! Oh, dear Reg! That is not the bad side of the theatre!"

"I know it, Vida; I know it!" he said with decision. "And that is why I *can not* have you there!"

Miss Vidalli drew back startled.

"Dearest, listen to me. I love you very much—so much that life without you now would be—a desert. I cannot even think of it!"

Clasped in each others arms, his lips pressed to hers, material thoughts faded into blissful dreamland. Vida was first to tear herself slowly, reluctantly away and speak. Her voice, sweet and low, trembled with the unutterable love which filled her soul. "Before I knew you my life was music—all music! I felt nothing else, I thought of nothing else: and yet something was lacking. I did not know it then, but I realise it now: and that—the crowning glory of a great undying love! You have sanctified my art; you are inseparable from it: and my happiness never will be

complete until the world witness its overpowering glory as I feel it in my heart."

"Oh, don't, Vida! You know how I love you!" he whispered, drawing her nearer.

"I must—I must!" she murmured. "With all my love for you, I should pine away and die—if I yielded—my mission unfulfilled! Give me time to prove the power within me. When I have established my claim to greatness and made the world acknowledge it—I can leave it: not before. It is my birthright. I *must* prove my claim!"

"If your love were equal to mine," said Thornton soberly, "that would be all-sufficient."

"For a time—yes: and then—the unsatisfied longing to reach the pinnacle toward which my whole life has been directed would permeate my happiness with its insidious poison and—bring misery to both of us. Let me first prove my birthright! That is the price all true artists pay for peace, tranquillity and—love! Only then is such a life complete, and only then can it bring happiness to another."

"You think so now, dearest, because you do

not know the happiness of *home* in its truest sense!"

"It would be beautiful at breakfast, and bliss at dinner: but—how about *between times* with you down-town all day. Oh, Reg!" The beautiful singer clasped her arms over her breast. "To be simply Mrs. Thornton, *one* of the *hundred and fifty elect* of New York Society, when I was born to an artistic throne. The queen who voluntarily abdicates may be happy: but she who never ascends the hereditary throne—*never*!"

"Can a wife desire a higher throne than her husband's heart?"

"How many wives—in your own set, for example—does that satisfy?"

"It *must* satisfy my wife!"

"Then to be your wife— I *must* give up my artistic career?"

"Yes! I feel like a brute to say it: but, I know the world far better than you: and you *will* be happy!"

"Why Vida, you are crying," he murmured in astonishment, holding her against his heart. "Don't sweetheart. You know I love you better

than the world and all it contains. Don't you?"

"Yes; I do."

"Better than my life! Or I would not take such a stand."

"All life is a sacrifice to something or of somebody," she whispered sadly to herself.

The distant report of the door-bell broke warningly on their silence, and footsteps approached along the corridor. Miss Vidalli dried her eyes, while Thornton arose and sauntered across the room. The outer door opened and a muffled voice was heard inquiring for Miss Vidalli.

The lovers regarded each other despairingly. Thornton glanced toward the card-room. Miss Vidalli nodded approvingly. "I will call you later," she added in a whisper as he passed out.

"Just in time!" rose Madame Leroux's greeting. "The Doctor is going."

"Is his second stack gone?" queried Madame Marceau.

"Just about," replied the astute landlady.

"One dollar, please, Madame!" said Doctor

Wyckoff, tossing his remaining chips on the table.

"I don't think I 'll enter the game," murmured Thornton, "I 've only a moment."

"Plenty of time for a round of jacks, my boy; sit down!" cried Rainey.

All thought of the "Sally-Lunn" and of the danger of loitering unseen and unannounced in hidden corners of a strange house had escaped Rosie's usually attentive mind. The scene between the lovers had been to her a tragedy. The sound of voices in the poker-room and the sight of the prima-donna now standing expectantly near the table ostensibly studying the evening papers, made little impression on her benumbed senses. She felt as if she should die and was wondering why she did not, when a servant entered bearing a card upon a silver tray.

Miss Vidalli was evidently disturbed. She looked at the card-room as if for protection, and then turning quickly, gave an affirmative nod.

Before the man could reach the corridor,

Hugh Melrose—the tool of Mrs. Parkinson—stepped into the room.

Certainly, he appeared to Rosie in no other light, and she felt herself ascending rung by rung the ladder to the topmost heaven of emotional delirium. Little cared she about the motive of his visit so long as he proved to be the saviour of Thornton and, indirectly, of her own miserable self.

Mr. Melrose may have noticed the lack of enthusiasm in his reception, for he said abruptly: "I regret I have but a moment."

"It is very good of you to come. Pray be seated," murmured the singer.

"Pardon the late hour; but I am off early in the morning."

"So I have heard."

Mr. Melrose looked surprised until Miss Vidalli added: "Florida must be delightful just now."

"I feared there would not be another opportunity of seeing you—before you sailed," he said hastily.

"I am not sure I shall be able to go," replied Miss Vidalli dubiously.

"But I am," interposed the great financier handing her an envelope; "that contains the wherewithal for two years. My wife was not sure of finding you, so begs you to accept it from *her*. Now profit to the utmost by your stay in Italy."

"In any event—" faltered Miss Vidalli; "how *can* I ever thank you and Mrs. Melrose?"

"Don't—don't!" he exclaimed, rising to his feet in protest.

"But—I don't know that I am free to—"

"Not a word, my child; or I shall run. Write Mrs. Melrose when you reach the other side. We shall await impatiently your appearance at the Metropolitan Opera House. Good-bye; and the best of luck go with you! And always be assured of a warm welcome at our house when you return!"

As the outer door closed upon Mr. Melrose, Miss Vidalli stood alone, staring vacantly before her.

"A royal flush!" cried Madame Leroux.

The party suddenly became a confusion of tongues.

"Four rounds of jacks for Mr. Thornton's

royal flush!" loudly proclaimed the delighted keeper of the "kitty." "Put up!"

Miss Vidalli looked with all her heart in her luminous eyes at the curtain, then at the envelope.

"I 'll help 'er!" muttered Rosie with a sly wink; and stealthily as a cat she slipped out of her hiding-place and down the corridor to the reception-room. She found Miss Vidalli peering into the envelope, evidently counting without removing the contents. Standing on the threshold Rosie held aloft her precious offering.

"Good-evenin', Miss!" she said, graciously dropping a curtsey. "I hopes yoh 's well? Yoh is n't ben to see us fur so long I thought I 'd bring yoh a 'Sally-Lunn' an' fine out how yoh wuz."

Miss Vidalli stared in amazement; then her eyes filled with tears. "Another proof of affection. I have more friends than I knew. Really, Rosie, you make it hard for me to decide whether I am a prima-donna or—simply a woman who loves home and—" she looked

involuntarily toward the card-room—"her friends."

"May be yoh is bof, Miss, 'ceptin' dat de uddeh ladies is n't got yoh grand voice. Now dere wuz Miss Jinny Melrose whut de young masteh loved too much tell dat conce't fur de little boys; but when 'e hea'd yoh—well! I guess dat 's why de fambly 's goin' to Florida —fur *her* health." Rosie winked confidentially. Then, continuing: "She 's like de muddeh whut wuz n't strong an' died young 'cause she loved somebody else."

"My Gawd!" reflected Rosie. "Dat 's de beautifulest parable! She 's tuhnin' green! I guess she 'll keep dat money now!"

Tears were coursing down Miss Vidalli's face, and still she gazed, open-eyed, full at Rosie.

"My Lawd, Miss! I hopes I is n't made yoh feel bad, 'cause yoh know eberybody lubs so to heah yoh sing an' yoh makes 'em *so happy* dey *could n't* git on widout yoh. Yoh 'll think I 's a crazy ole niggeh to tell yoh 'bout ouh fambly mattehs, but et 's all oveh now an' dey is n't no good keepin' et."

"Rosie," said Miss Vidalli trying to smile, "you were right. I 'm a woman if I am a prima-donna; but—the prima-donna is going to Europe and the woman is crying because she loves her friends and may never see them again."

"Please don't say dat, Miss. Ef yoh lubs 'em, yoh 'll come back."

"Some day—perhaps."

"An'—er—is yoh goin' so soon, Miss?"

Miss Vidalli looked at her envelope, at Rosie again and then at the envelope. "Yes," she answered softly; and stepping to the table she began to scan the newspaper columns. "Yes; sooner than I thought. By the 'Landgraf' at half-past five in the morning. I am going aboard to-night."

"Rosie," she said with a searching glance, "will you promise me not to speak of it? I don't wish any one there to see me off."

"Oh, o' co'se not, Miss! Nobody knows I 's ben heah, anyway."

Miss Vidalli touched an electric button, and seating herself at a desk, was writing rapidly,

when a servant entered the room and approached.

"Don't fail to give this to Mr. Thornton when he finishes his game in there," she said, enclosing the letter and sealing it. "Should he ask to see me, say I have gone out. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"Telephone Sherrill to have a closed cab at the *other door* in fifteen minutes. Then come straight to me. I have some commissions for you."

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"Can't I help yoh, Miss?" Rosie repeated her first words of genuine sympathy: "Can't I help you?" with sudden comprehension of the heroic action she had witnessed and of a superior quality in the singer's nature.

"You have helped me already—*more* than you know."

Miss Vidalli stepped impulsively toward the card-room, lifted her hand, hesitated and without touching the curtain, suddenly turned and came back to the desk. She was very pale and her eyes were quite dry.

"I shall carry this with me," she said, taking up the "Sally-Lunn," "and with it many happy memories of the little home up-town. Good-bye."

In sudden contrition Rosie bent to kiss the singer's hand; but when she raised her eyes for a last look at the lovely face, they were blinded by tears. Then she heard a soft murmur: "Care for him tenderly—for my sake." The old mammy hurried down the corridor, feeling more like a culprit than a victor. Only the best interests of her beloved young master justified her duplicity; and the consciousness that Miss Vidalli would never tell of it went far toward lightening her spirit when she found herself once more in the vicinity of the poker players.

"Oh, my; what a pig hand!" exclaimed Madame Foulon.

"Four rounds more for Mr. Thornton's four aces!" cried the happy mistress of the "kitty."

"Lucky at cards, unlucky in love," repeated Madame Topeka. "Really, Mr. Thornton, you are an exception to the rule. I hear all the girls in New York are trying to marry you."

"One would suffice."

"Oh! It 's evident you 're not a born New Yorker!"

"I vote here."

"That does n't affect your morals."

"Some people are more susceptible than others."

"Did you hear that, 'Madame Ninon d'Enclos'? Now don't look coy."

"Oh, I peg bardon," simpered the aged bride. "I sought you mean Madame Marceau."

"How could you?" cried the irate Frenchwoman. "I never try to appear younger than I am; though I may have reason to—when I, also, am *seventy-five!*"

"Oh! Oh! I tid not know you are zat *young!*"

"Here, here, children; put up!" Madame Leroux rapped authoritatively and joined the general laugh, above which rose a spiteful cry of "Cat!"

Thornton appeared restless and gave but perfunctory attention to the game, tipping his head to one side expectantly and occasionally turning to glance furtively toward the reception-room.

"Poh chile!" murmured Rosie in mournful perplexity. "He 'll be *so onhappy;* but I guess dey is n't nobody whut does n't know whut 's best fur 'im."

"Leave me out this time, please!" And Thornton, rising, slipped through the curtain into the reception-room.

Rosie immediately changed her point of view and saw him cross the room and press an electric button.

"Have you seen Miss Vidalli, François?" he inquired of the servant who answered the bell.

"Yes, sir; and she asked me to give you this."

Thornton waited until he was alone and nervously opened the letter; while Rosie, leaning breathlessly forward in apprehension of some extraordinary outbreak, saw to her amazement and relief that he read the letter quietly to the end.

"All life is a sacrifice to *something or of somebody!*" he repeated emphatically, recalling Vida's spoken words. Crossing the room he again touched the electric call and waited there

until François reappeared. "Has Miss Vidalli gone out yet?"

"Yes, sir; fifteen minutes ago."

Thornton hesitated as if to question him further, but finally said quietly, "Thank you," and stood watching the man out of the room. When he placed the letter in his pocket Rosie noticed that he was deadly pale. He remained a moment immovable as if dazed; then turned, started for the card-room and stopped short. At his feet lay a man's visiting-card.

Thornton stooped to pick it up, recoiled and grasped the chair-back for support. "Hugh Melrose!"

Rosie could see his lips frame the words and then she noticed that his face seemed suddenly older as he turned a startled glance toward the division curtain. With a hasty movement he reached for the card and tearing it into fragments dropped them in the scrap basket. Taking the letter from his pocket, he re-read it slowly and holding it an instant to a gas jet, dropped it in the empty grate and with bowed head watched the final clue to Miss Vidalli's fancied perfidy reduced to ashes.

Thornton had begun life anew when he looked up and bravely returned with resolute step to the card-room.

"Madame," he said gently to the landlady, "I am obliged to leave you now; please put my chips in the 'kitty.'"

Rosie waited to hear no more. Out of the house she stole, swiftly, triumphantly and, yet, an unconscious, meaningless laugh died in a great sob as her black, tear-stained face faded into the wintry night.

CHAPTER XII.

ROSIE BARGAINS FOR A HALO.

"So my speret said to myself, 'Does yoh want to weah a hello in Hebben, Roxana?'

"'Yes, Madam,' says I, 'de best whut dey is. . . . Whut shall I do, Madam?'

"'Gawd knows,' says she. 'Yoh 's got yoh own head, an' I guess ef yoh wants a hello onto et right bad yoh 'll learn how to think wid et.'"

CHAPTER XII.

ROSIE BARGAINS FOR A HALO.

Rarely is any one missed in the life of the great metropolis. Men and women arrive and depart like the fashions and the seasons, each fulfilling a mission in his or her time. Then the social tide rises over them and the world knows them no more.

Miss Vidalli in her turn, sank out of sight, unsought, unmourned and finally unmentioned, not through fault of her personality or her gifts, but, because of New York.

How much or how little Thornton missed her was a matter of conjecture only to those who knew of his infatuation. He returned to his old haunts and his routine-duties with the outward indifference of the schooled man of the world.

Rosie, however, was forced to recognise the void which had come into his life. She observed, the morning following her visit to the Maison Leroux, that Thornton appeared very listless and responded to her solicitude for his health and his comfort with unusual gentleness, as if grateful for any evidence whatsoever of affection and fidelity. That his heart was sore, she knew, for he had not only to endure the eternal separation from the woman he loved, but the galling belief that she had ignominiously used him as a means to an unworthy end—that she had fled with Hugh Melrose.

But he was too proud to mention or even acknowledge it. He had been deceived and—there it ended.

Divining his attitude of mind, Rosie's adjustable philosophy enabled her to maintain silence as to the truth about the singer's departure, in view of the advantage which, to her mind, was thereby given to Thornton. She knew that nothing was lasting, that emotions died of their own fever and, above all, that propinquity kept love alive: and she figured

that being a man and consequently fickle, his interests in life would revive about the time of Virginia's return from the South. Yet when, sometimes, the loving old soul came upon him unawares, through the months which followed, she had to admit to herself that, for once, her reckoning might be wrong. His laughter though cheery as of old, and as easily aroused, ended abruptly, its echoes lost in the dream-world where dwelt heart and mind—a world to which Rosie could never penetrate.

The old darkey did a deal of thinking in those days, more than she had ever done in all her previous existence; for Thornton's habitual preoccupation threw her out of touch with his intimate social life, especially as he seemed to have lost all desire to entertain his friends at his home.

One day in a fit of desperation she bought a copy of *The Social Shotgun* and took it to Miss Driscoll—or rather, Mrs. Zander, for an increase of artistic fame and funds had enabled the little portrait painter to take a larger studio and a husband. By the following week, the name Zander appeared upon the mailing list

and Rosie had become a paid-up subscriber to *The Social Shotgun.*

Again in touch with "Sassiety," thanks to this reliable source of information, and fortified by unswerving fidelity to her cause, Rosie renewed her campaign as match-maker with patient comprehension of her task. Semi-weekly visits to Virginia appearing ineffective after a time, she diplomatically enlisted the sympathy of Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, who obligingly employed every means of throwing the young people together: for in her pique at Thornton's defection, Virginia naturally awaited his initiative before resuming their former relations.

An invitation for her young master and herself to Villa Melrose in August attested the success of the old mammy's efforts. Still, that was only one step.

The winter season brought a revival of the small, intimate luncheons and dinners at the apartment. August came again and with it the annual visit to Newport; and Thornton seemed to have settled down as family-friend to the Melroses—of the sort that grows bald-

headed in service and dying is covered by expensive flowers and besprinkled by Platonic tears.

Rosie was hopelessly perplexed. She was not unhappy, but, in so far as it was possible for any darkey to realise it, she was conscious of growing old, and in her desire to see the fulfilment of her fondest wish, she resolved to make it a subject of extra and special prayer.

One morning in early June, she entered Mrs. Driscoll-Zander's studio in a state of suppressed excitement. She closed the door carefully and looked behind all the easel-pictures. Mr. Driscoll-Zander was not visible. The unsuccessful member of the family, he was tending the baby in the other room.

"What is the matter?" inquired Mrs. Zander, ready to laugh before she heard the story.

"Lots!" said Rosie mysteriously. "Does yoh mind dat picture o' me whut yoh made fur myself? Et 's alive!"

"With what?" said Mrs. Zander, apprehending some pest.

"Sperets!" whispered the old darkey reverently. "Dey done got into de thing dis

mawnin'! I wuz down on my knees a-sayin' my beads fur de young masteh an' Miss Jinny, wid one eye on de Virgin an' de uddeh on myself oveh de bed, jes' as I always does when I 's prayin'; an' all to oncet de two eyes in my picture tuhned an' looked down straight into de two eyes in myself. I wuz so scared, I mos' fell undeh de bed; but I could n't git way fum dem eyes. Dey wanted to say somepin' to me; an' pretty soon de lips begin to move like I in de picture wanted to tell my real self somepin'; an' I could heah 'em say, 'Roxana!'

"'Yes, Madam,' I says soft-like; fur, I knowed it wuz my speret an' not me, an' yoh 's got to be powe'ful p'lite to sperets ur dey treats yoh scand'lous.

"'Roxana, yoh heart 's white now ef yoh skin is black, an' yoh 's goin' to be washed white all oveh in Hebben, too, 'cause yoh 's ben good, an' decent, an' clean; but 't ain't 'nough jes' to have yoh skin *white:* de mos' ob 'em up dere is jes' dat way an' dey is n't nothin' moh; but dey *is* folks whut *is!* An' ef I knows yoh, I guess yoh wants to be one o' dem kind. Yoh 's

thunk all yoh life an' pervided ahead. Yoh tuk care ob de young masteh whut had consumption tell 'e died an' yoh got yoh freedom fur et; yoh wohked an' stahved an' saved tell yoh had 'nough to buy a first-class buryin' an' a cross fur yoh grave; an' den a good angel painted yoh fur yoh fambly when yoh 's dead an' yoh tuk yoh ha'd ea'ned money to git a grand gold frame to keep me in. Yoh 's did jes' 'nough already to ea'n a white robe made out ob a cloud an' git in at de gate wid de crowd: fur yoh shroud won't do, an' yoh can't take dem beautiful white silk nightgowns whut de queen mos' woh out an' gib yoh, wid yoh.'

" 'Now de bes' folks whut 's up dere an' is did de mos' good, is got to weah 'hellos' so de crowd won't bow down befoh de wrong ones.' "

"Hellos?" said Mrs. Zander, interrupting the narrative.

"Yes, hellos whut yoh weahs on yoh head like de great royalties in de boxes at de operay."

"Oh, you mean a *halo!*"

"Yes, dat 's et; a *hello!* Some ob 'em 's jes' a teenty-weenty line; an' some ob 'em 's got

two ur three lines; an' de grand ones is got a big gold band, jes' like yoh sees 'em in de pictures. So my speret said to myself, 'Does yoh want to weah a hello in Hebben, Roxana?'

"'Yes, Madam,' says I, 'de bes' whut dey is!'

"'Den,' says she, 'j'ine up de young masteh quick wid Miss Jinny ur nobody won't live to see et; an' Gawd knows whut 'll become ob 'im, an' et 'll be yoh fault; an' when yoh ax at de gate o' Hebben fur a hello, dey 'll tell yoh dey 's out ob 'em.'

"So I says, 'Whut shall I do, Madam?'

"'Gawd knows!' says she. 'Yoh 's got yoh own head, an' I guess ef yoh wants a *hello* onto et right bad yoh 'll learn how to think wid et.'

"So I says, 'An whut kind ob a hello will dat buy me, Madam?'

"'A big gold one,' says she, 'jes' like dis!' An' will yoh b'lieve et? De head begin to nod, an' de two eyes to wink, an' de frame come off de wall an' off de picture straight at me, a-lookin' jes' like a big gold hello.

"Well! I wuz so 'fraid et would fly de mark an' hit me in de head, I fainted clean 'way. An' when I come to, I wuz sprawlin' on de bed,

an' my heart goin' like a ingine. An' dere on de wall wuz de frame; an' de picture wuz smilin' at me; an' when I got up, de eyes followed me all 'roun' de room an' to de doh, fur I looked back to see.

"Well," continued Rosie, "I needed a cup o' tea, by dat time; an' while I wuz drinkin' et, de grace o' Gawd p'inted out de way, an' Miss, I guess et 's in dis book, fur de honey chile keeps it on 'is writin'-desk to look in, when 'e wants to know whur folks lives."

Producing *The Social Register* from a capacious pocket she handed it to Mrs. Zander.

"Whom do you wish?' inquired the artist.

"Miss Parkinson, ef yoh please."

"I thought you did n't like her?" said Mrs. Zander, copying the address on a slip of paper.

"I does n't; I does n't *'prove* ob 'er a bit; but dat ain't nothin' when yoh needs folks to help yoh. My Lawd! I 's goin' to make 'er a 'Sally-Lunn,' like I wuz 'er bes' fren. *'Deed I is!* She writes fur de *Shotgun;* I hea'd de queen tell Miss Dalalli so—poh debbil! I wondeh ef she 's dead yit ur jes' a-breakin'

hearts wid 'er grand voice? My Lawd, could n't she sing! Well! She 's kep' out ob de way pretty well: so, I guess dey wuz some good in 'er afteh all. Yes, I 's goin' to Miss Parkinson. Gawd knows whut I 'll say: I does n't. I 'll scraggle out somepin' widout sayin', *Shotgun,* an' I guess she 'll undehstan'."

"Rosie" was a magic password to any of Thornton's social circle. Consequently she had no trouble in penetrating to Mrs. Parkinson's boudoir the following day.

"Good-mawnin', Miss," began the old darkey with a respectful curtsey. "'Deed, Madam, I hopes yoh 'll 'scuse me; but yoh looks so young I always thinks ob yoh as *Miss.*"

"Thank you, Rosie; I wish I could delude myself into that way of thinking; but the tailor always knows just where the old garment is darned and patched."

"I 's ben a fine seamstress, Miss, an' I can see patches mighty good yit, ef my eyes is gib out; but de good Lawd 'isself could n't see none on yoh."

Rosie wished Fritz could have been there

that she might express her amusement in a backward kick.

"I wonder what the old devil wants?" reflected Mrs. Parkinson; but she said aloud, "I have been living very quietly."

"Yes, Miss, we 's missed yoh so much at ouh house; so I made a 'Sally-Lunn' an' brung et roun' to ask yoh how yoh wuz feelin', 'cause I thought yoh 'd like et wid yoh tea dis aftehnoon;" and Rosie uncovered an example of her finest baking.

"How sweet! Of course I shall; and enjoy it doubly because of your kind thought," said Mrs. Parkinson, graciously accepting the gift. "It has been very lonely since my dear husband's death." The widow's voice trembled, and she touched a dainty black-bordered handkerchief to her eyes as she glanced at a photograph on her writing-desk.

"Yes, Miss, I undehstan'; but I guess de ladies whut does n't git any husbands 't all, is de mos' lonelies'; an' de men, too. Now, dere 's my young masteh, de lublies' man whut is——"

"You make him too comfortable, Rosie."

"No, Miss, 't ain't dat. He 's too bashful. He wants helpin' on."

Mrs. Parkinson's sudden outburst of hilarity ill accorded with her billows of formal grief.

"Not he!" cried the widow spasmodically. "Try somebody else."

" 'Deed, Miss, I b'lieves et! Et 's ben hangin' on so long; an'——"

"You mean Miss Melrose."

"Well, Miss, I won't jes' say dat, fur dey might n't like et; but sometimes when de frens knows et—*dey 's ways ob helpin' 'em to say et!* Now dere wuz Miss Kitty Simpson down in Washin'ton whut knowed Mr. Cobb loved 'er an' did n't know how to say et. She tried an' she tried wid 'im; but 'e—*could n't!* So she thought she 'd fix 'im. She knowed a man wid a wife an' nine chillun an' one on de way whut wuz writin' fur de papehs an' needed moh money 'an dey could git. So she paid 'im good—fur she wuz rich—to rumour her an' Mr. Cobb in de papehs. Well! Dey did n't gib deir names at fust, but eberybody knowed who dey meant; an' den dey did. Mr. Cobb went 'roun' de whole time lookin' like a lob-

ster, 'e wuz so 'shamed o' 'isself; but, somehow, 'e could n't say et yit.

"One day dey wuz settin' in de pahlah—him an' her—an' de doh-bell ringed; an' de butleh brung in a papeh, all wrapped, wid a blue mark onto et. Miss Kitty knowed whut et wuz, fur she paid de papeh-man extra to do et. Dey wuz settin' on de sofa—on de two ends. So Miss Kitty moved up to de middle an' says, 'I wondeh whut dat is. Le' 's see! So Mr. Cobb moved up, too; an' dey read it togeddeh. Jes' den, ole miss called de butleh an' 'e had to go; so I did n't heah whut Mr. Cobb said: but dey got married mighty quick, Miss, an' had lots o' chillun.

"Now, ef I knowed somebody like dat papeh-man, I 'd go to 'em *too quick* fur de young masteh's sake; fur, 'e 'll *neveh* git married by 'isself; an' I wants to git de deah chile settled befoh I gits ole. Well! Mebbe de good Lawd 'll help me somehow; fur a black cat run afteh me as I come down de street—*cleah up to dis doh!* Dat 's *shuh luck*!"

"Then you 'll get your wish," laughed Mrs. Parkinson.

"Does yoh think so, Miss?"

"Surely."

"Thank Gawd! Now, ef somebody 'd only *promise* me."

"Trust in the black cat."

That such lightly spoken assurance of help was prompted by personal motives as worthy as her own the old darkey did not believe; but it in no wise lessened the glow of joy on her black face as she replied: "Thank you, Miss; I will; fur dem animals does n't know whut dey 's doin', 'ceptin' when dey 's ketchin' rats an' mice. Et 's a speret whut leads 'em to de right places an' helps folks wid deir luck."

Rosie loved the sunny places, and when she grew too warm, a big red slice of ice-cold watermelon. With such luxuries assured her, the passage of time usually made little impression upon her African moods. However, after her visit to Mrs. Parkinson, her ardour for the union of Virginia and Thornton suffered no diminution, even though subject to brief lapses: but, through sunshine and shadow, she was dimly conscious of a broad gold "hello" above her head suspended on the slen-

der thread of the widow's promise. She knew the latter's power and trusted her discretion in selecting the moment for a suitable start.

At last her faith was rewarded. Mrs. Zander read to her the significant words in a copy of *The Social Shotgun,* one paragraph following the other: "Rumours of an important engagement are agitating Newport." "Reginald Thornton is spending the Fourth of July holiday with Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Melrose and their charming niece at Villa Melrose on the Cliffs."

A month later a second instalment of related paragraphs appeared: "Newport breathlessly awaits the announcement of the most notable engagement of the season." "Reginald Thornton is once more a guest at Villa Melrose; this time for a fortnight."

At the expiration of the visit Mrs. Parkinson contributed another and more pointed paragraph: "It is significant that Reginald Thornton was joined by a member of his immediate family during his recent visit at the rose-terraced villa on the Cliffs at Newport. Now

when will the public hear the formal announcement so long expected?"

"Dat 's me!" exclaimed Rosie with pardonable pride to Mrs. Zander. "I 's glad fur *his* sake dat she did n't say de 'member ob de fambly' wuz *cullud*. Strangehs might n't jes' undehstan', yoh know, and dey 's *'ristocrats* ef dey *is n't* New Yohkehs—de Tho'ntons is! 'Deed, Madam, things is turrible changed sence de wah. Ef yoh comes heah, an' dey does n't know who yoh is, yoh 's jes' *dirt* undeh deir feet; an' dey is n't got no gran'faddehs an' gran'muddehs neetheh, fur, I hea'd de queen say so; an' *she* knows. Dey 's queer doin's dese days, an' I is n't in 'em!"

"I don't know about that," observed the artist; "if Mrs. Parkinson continue her assistance, it looks to me as if you are in a way to figure prominently in the most important doings of the coming season."

"I will, Madam; I *will*," exclaimed Rosie, inspired by the prospect; "so help me, Gawd!"

One Sunday in the Christmas holidays she came to the conclusion that her patience with Thornton had gone far enough. Never before

had she seen a lover so unresponsive to the prodding of friends and a long expectant public. Even that morning the united press of the city had openly connected his name with that of Miss Melrose: and yet, after church, he had returned with Mr. and Mrs. Melrose and Virginia for a previously arranged luncheon at his apartment, as nonchalantly as if he had never thought of marriage. Such indifference, the old mammy considered ill befitting a young man from whom a demonstration of some sort was just then expected. Therefore, the instant the meal was served by Fritz, she donned her "company bandana," which the Melroses loved to see, and descended to the entry in a state of wild excitement over the varying reports of the engagement, as carried to her by Fritz and the Zanders, determined to convince herself of their truth or fallacy by personal observation. At first glance, the informality of the company gave the appearance of a family party: for, Mr. and Mrs. Melrose were lounging comfortably in easy chairs in the salon reading the daily papers. Virginia and Thornton were not

visible, though Rosie detected their shadows—seated well apart on the library sofa—on the stained glass beside which she eagerly dropped into her favourite seat.

"Half the company is down with the *grippe*," Virginia was saying, "and the substitutes are called in from the highways and the by-ways. The performances have been deplorable the past fortnight. We've given our box away for to-morrow night. Uncle Hugh declares he won't go again until the principal singers, at least, are in better shape."

"It has been an awful season," said Thornton. "I never remember having seen opera so badly given."

"Now fur Gawd's sake, whut's dat to do wid yoh gittin' married?" mumbled the old mammy. "Eberybody else is talkin' 'bout et. Why can't yoh?"

So absorbed was she in her vigil that the shock of a sudden peal from the door-bell almost threw her off her seat. Before Fritz could arrive from the pantry she had the door opened.

"Is Mr. Thornton at home?" inquired a dapper young man with a business-like manner.

"Yes, sir, he is; only he ain't. He 's busy."

"So am I," said the visitor, edging his way into the entry. "Please tell Mr. Thornton I would like to see him just *one minute.* It is very important to him."

Rosie eyed the man suspiciously; but Fritz was there to watch him and she hastened to deliver the message.

"Ask the man what he wants," replied Thornton; "tell him I have guests and can't leave."

The old mammy looked very solemn when she returned to the library. Fate had unexpectedly and suddenly given her absolute control of the situation which had so long perplexed her and puzzled society. Her heart thumped unevenly. She felt as if the words which rose to her lips would slip back and suffocate her. Lifting her eyes in silent prayer for courage, she was momentarily blinded by a bright golden ray. It was the entry light beyond the antique yellow glass; but to Rosie it was the promise of a heavenly reward.

"What did the man say?" asked Thornton a second time.

"He said 'is papeh sent 'im; an' 'e would lose 'is job, ef 'e did n't fine out to-day whetheh yoh an'—Miss Jinny—*is goin' to git married!*"

The fall of a pin would have startled any of the three in the ensuing silence. Then Thornton, with a noticeable effort to conceal his embarrassment, spoke gently as Miss Melrose shrunk, white and startled, into the sofa corner.

"Well, Rosie, in such cases it is customary to ask the lady first. Simply tell the man I cannot see him; and I will consult Miss Melrose."

CHAPTER XIII.

ROSIE PLANS FOR A WEDDING.

"Weddin's is good fur rheumatiz," she reflected with satisfaction at the end of her day's labours. "Dey keeps yoh thinkin' ob uddeh things."

CHAPTER XIII.

ROSIE PLANS FOR A WEDDING.

At breakfast the following morning, Rosie received the satisfying assurance of a broad gold "hello" in Eternity. Thornton told her as a great secret, to be divulged to no one, that he was to marry "Miss Jinny."

His eyes laughed, and his mouth twitched as if he wanted to say more. The old mammy knew he was thinking of the way she had forced his proposal, and became so self-conscious that her felicitations were not what she could have wished them. Still she knew she had done a great and good work and felt his unspoken gratitude; and what more could she crave? To her, now, the happiness of the young couple was supreme: although it must be confessed that with love for both deep-

rooted in her heart, the greater share of affection belonged to Thornton. He was, in thought, her "baby," and she liked to delude herself with the belief that she had "raised" him from infancy. Therefore, after he had gone down-town and she had had time to recover her equanimity, the result of gaining her heart's desire appeared to her hardly as attractive as she had expected. It simply meant giving up the cosey apartment where she had reigned so long, and sharing her care of him with another woman who, lovely though she might be, would exercise full sway over him in the future and look after his comfort. She felt as if her "baby" had been torn from her arms; and crossing her hands over her breast she began to rock to and fro, sobbing piteously.

Suddenly a new thought illuminated her face and stopped her tears as well as her rocking: a small distant voice was lisping words of comfort. The old mammy arose with a soft light in her eyes and, murmuring inarticulate nothings to herself, went quietly about her work. Even though the routine of her life be changed, the future promised new interests,

new joys and a grandeur which she had never yet experienced even "befoh de wah." Lifting her eyes reverently she prayed that she might not become "puffed-up an' furgittin' ob ole frens," and ended absently by omitting the amen. She had suddenly thought of Mrs. Parkinson and her invaluable aid in uniting the two young people.

Rosie had been too thoroughly trained in the old school of Southern chivalry to allow a courtesy, however slight, to go unrewarded. Therefore, it became her instant duty to stir together a "Sally-Lunn" and to carry it hot to the widow, as indicating the state of her gratitude which her vow of secrecy to Thornton, and also, a certain delicacy due surreptitious contributors to scandalous journals, forbade her expressing verbally. She was sure of being understood, knowing that in society, as well as in politics and commerce, a silent exchange of amenities oftentimes conveyed the reward for both diabolical and worthy deeds. Rosie's heart was singularly stirred. She felt that she had arrived at the jumping-off place in life and that the credit side of her account

needed the final balancing. A few more "Sally-Lunns" would do it; and then she would be ready for the "hello" whenever the trumpet sounded the call.

"Weddin's is good fur rheumatiz," she reflected with satisfaction at the end of her day's labours. "Dey keeps yoh thinkin' ob uddeh things."

Indeed, the whole week passed like a dream to the loving old heart in squaring accounts with the world and listening to Miss Melrose's plans for the trousseau and the wedding. The latter had been fixed for Easter-Week at St. Bartholomew's Church; and a reception, which included their entire social circle, was to follow at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Melrose.

In the meantime, society reporters were vainly besieging the homes of the prospective bride and groom beseeching definite information which Mr. Melrose deemed it wise to withhold and give out at the last moment to the Sunday morning papers: for, he and Mrs. Melrose wished to first announce the engagement at a large dinner party which they intended to give the preceding evening.

As Rosie had been promised a place where she could witness this important function, she announced herself there on Saturday evening long before Miss Melrose had donned her dinner-gown—for the old mammy was too much alive to the excitement of the occasion to remain at home, especially as Thornton was being carefully looked after by Fritz. Therefore, she received gratefully Miss Melrose's suggestion that she might like to see the guests arrive, and, being placed under the care of the housekeeper, was conducted to a roomy bower of green palms and fragrant shrubs which occupied the mezzanine floor above a vaulted gallery connecting a magnificent music-room and the banquet hall. This secluded spot was open at the ends in order that one orchestra might furnish music for both apartments.

A score or more musicians were already massing themselves on the brink of the banquet hall conversing softly in a foreign tongue as they uncased and tuned their instruments. Unobserved in the subdued light, Rosie placed her chair where a gap in the foliage commanded the stately apartment in which the

guests were to assemble. No one was visible, though just below her she could hear Mrs. Melrose saying in gentle high-bred tones: "I find it singular that Vida should have insisted upon returning that money with six per cent interest added to it. It was a gift, not a loan."

"True," responded a voice which Rosie recognised as that of Mr. Melrose; "I like her suggestion, though, that we use it to educate some other deserving singer."

"*It seems noble.* I only hope she was not actuated by other motives."

Mr. Melrose laughed scoffingly. "Your imagination would fire a locomotive."

"Financial inducements alone did not bring her back to New York; she was making just as much over there," retorted his wife.

Rosie felt a cold chill creeping around her heart. The moment was too frightful for reflection: she bent lower over her knees for support and listened with bated breath.

"She probably came to see her step-father," suggested Mr. Melrose. "She always seemed fond of him."

"Because of his *fidelity* to her mother," was the quick response.

"He died two years ago," continued Mrs. Melrose, to bridge over a painful silence.

"I would n't fret, if I were you," said her husband indifferently. "Time changes all things."

"Excepting a woman's heart."

"Vida is above all, a prima-donna," observed Mr. Melrose more cheerfully; "after that—a woman."

"Yes: but Vida is now a *great* prima-donna: therein lies the danger. She can afford to listen to her heart. We don't know but that—" Mrs. Melrose hesitated and almost whispered, "she may still wield an influence over Reg."

"Nonsense! She has neither seen nor heard from him in three years—you know that perfectly well."

"Nevertheless, I can't overcome a feeling of guilt for my duplicity in that matter."

"Bah! I would n't do business that way!"

"Hugh!" exclaimed Mrs. Melrose evidently shocked.

"Reg seems very fond of Virginia," she added with a sigh.

"Don't make yourself miserable unnecessarily."

"He 's human."

"Then why—of all nights—did you invite Vida for this particular dinner?"

"They say most women become flabby-minded at middle-age," replied Mrs. Melrose humbly.

"It was an impulse," she continued. "The telephone does n't give one time to reflect: so when Vida called me up this morning to ask when she could see me, I knew I had n't a moment before dinner; and I thought it, also, a hospitable thing to do—the day of her arrival, after such a long absence. I had to have an extra woman anyway, as Mrs. Hampton-Yorke had telephoned five minutes before to ask an invitation for Lord Ridgeley who has just arrived in town."

"Ridgeley?"

"Yes. The one Mrs. Parkinson is supposed to be interested in."

"Would Madam like to see the dinner-

table?" interrupted a third voice. "Everything is in readiness."

"Yes. Come with me, Hugh."

Rosie leaned heavily on her knees, when left alone to reflect. She was too weak to move. With closed eyes she seemed floating off through limitless space, a homeless spirit in a sea of darkness. A dawning consciousness of light fraught with a bitter penetrating chill filled her with indefinable terror. Instinctively she reached out to draw her thin shawl more closely around her quivering shoulders and, with numb fingers, to tighten the strings of her faded bombasine bonnet under her attenuated chin. She was once more tired and hungry, a friendless wanderer in the streets of a great city. People drew away from her as they passed, hurrying on as if she were a leper. Some leered at her with greedy eyes until satisfied that she was worth contempt only, and left her to the consideration of the next thieving tramp. The lights flamed higher and she could see that all the faces were black; not a white one in all that swarming concourse. Some, she knew, and then the familiar land-

marks of Seventh Avenue loomed up in the background.

Seventh Avenue! Her heart seemed to stop its beating; and as she staggered toward a wall for support, she fell headlong into a garishly lighted cellar. Coloured women with the eyes and talons of eagles were feverishly examining an assortment of splendid garments which depended from a long line of pegs.

"Dat 's mine," gasped Rosie, snatching at the skirts of the nearest woman. "De queen gib et to me. Drap et, fur Gawd's sake! Drap et!" she cried to the next. "Miss Annie gib et to me, an' I 's woh et to special masses. Fur de lub ob de Virgin, Miss: don't tech et!" she implored on her knees before a third. "Et 's de grand hat whut little Miss Jinny gib me to weah at de charity conce't." Blinded by tears she dropped her head limply on her chest and swayed forward.

"Get up!" called a harsh, unfamiliar voice. "This is no place for you! Your grave-cross is sold for debt! You are dead and the night-doctor's ambulance is waiting at the door!"

"Jes' one moh look; jes' one moh look!"

moaned Rosie, feebly lifting her eyes toward a brilliant light at the end of the cellar. "My Gawd!" she cried with sudden strength, raising her arms in protest. "My Gawd! Stop 'im! Dat 's my picture whut Miss Driscoll done painted fur my fambly! I did n't mean et when I said dey could fire at et in a shootin'-gall'ry! I wuz *only* jokin'! Don't let 'im shoot! Oh, my Gawd! Bof my eyes is out! Don'—don' let 'im shoot de mouf! Dem lips neveh said no bad to nobody!"

"Did n't they? Did n't they?" cried a familiar ringing voice; and before her stood Miss Vidalli luminous-eyed and transcendentally beautiful. "They ruined my life! Shoot out the tongue, my man. It sent me away from the one who loved me and whom I love still, better than I love my music. *That is why I have come back*—to claim him and drive out this miserable lying old creature! He loves me still! He loves me still!" A long triumphant laugh reverberated above the heads of the gathering throng; and Miss Vidalli bent over her vindictively. "You tried to wreck *my life!* Now see what you have done to yours!"

Snatching a shimmering object from a heap of splendid brocades and velvets, she held it high above her head. "Who wants a halo? Who wants a halo!"

A wild stampede; a roar of countless voices; and a cloud of long, waving arms filled the stifling air. "Me! Et's mine!" frantically shrieked a hated voice. "She died, owin' me fur 'er room. Wid whut de night-doctehs pays fur 'er corpse dat'll be jes' 'nough. Thank yoh, mam. Thank yoh. Ha, ha, ha, ha! Isn't I grand? Jes' look at me; jes' look at me!"

Rosie had barely strength to recognise the yellow-skinned, rotten-toothed, snarling mulatto, her ex-landlady—in whose flat she had suffered untold anguish—framed in a circle of blinding golden light, before sinking with a wild cry of horror into oblivion.

CHAPTER XIV.

ROSIE HEARS THE CHERUBIM.

"Society would be extinguished if denied the privileges of exaggeration."—Mrs. Parkinson.

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All differences had been wiped out, all misunderstandings corrected in so far as concerned the future, and if regrets remained, it was the inevitable duty of brave men and good women to leave them unspoken in the secret recesses of their hearts, along with the tender memories of a dead, forever vanished past.

CHAPTER XIV.

ROSIE HEARS THE CHERUBIM.

"Mr. and Mrs. Melrose were here a moment ago. If Madam will kindly wait, I will find them."

Aroused by the butler's gently modulated tones, Rosie listened intently: but again all was still save for the low murmur of the musicians at the other end of the loggia. She had not slept: she had simply drifted away on one of those visionary journeyings with which she fed her imagination and filled her life. Perspiration flowed in fantastic rivulets down her black face as she lifted her head and gazed wonderingly about her; but the burden of the new fear oppressing her heart dimmed the features of the splendid apartment into which she was looking with dull, lustreless eyes. The plot un-

folding before her in the great mansion had become too complex for her shattered understanding, and, it seemed to her, comprehensible only through some divine miracle.

A movement at the farther end of the room attracted her attention. A woman of regal carriage was trailing a gown of shimmering white across the polished floor. Her head and neck were ablaze with flashing jewels and as she stopped beside the piano and turned her uplifted eyes toward the beflowered balcony, Rosie nervously polished and readjusted her spectacles for a second look. She felt it must be Miss Vidalli; she knew it was—yet prayed she might be mistaken. Time had modified her recollection of the singer's lovely face: but, as she gazed, it seemed to her that she had never before beheld such marvellous beauty.

A strain of music floated up to her like the distant song of a nightingale. The prima-donna was humming softly to herself and as Rosie bent her head lower to listen, she seemed to hear again Henley's beautiful words which Thornton had sung through six happy weeks:

"The sweetest flower that blows,
I give you as we part;
You think it but a rose,
Ah, me! It is my heart!"

"Brava! Brava!" rose a fresh young voice above muffled applause as the last note soared gently into space and died lingeringly among the singing cherubim on the ceiling. "The first song you ever sang in this house." And Virginia, arms extended, was half-way across the room ere Rosie espied her, to welcome Miss Vidalli with an affectionate embrace.

"Yes," replied the singer, "that was indeed the echo of a happy day."

"Mr. Thornton asked for it," said Virginia self-consciously.

"Yes: so he did," said Miss Vidalli with studied deliberation. "How long ago that seems. I have not heard of him in all these years—excepting—'among those present.' How is he?"

"He is dining with us to-night."

The two women were regarding each other closely.

"I believe I am to see a number of old friends," observed Miss Vidalli cautiously.

"Have n't you longed to see them—*just a little bit*—at times?"

"More than you know," replied the prima-donna with such fervency that Virginia in an attempt to appear disinterested, caught her arm and slowly led her down the room, forgetful of Rosie's presence in the loggia. "When I received the cablegram offering me an engagement at the Metropolitan, I interpreted it, 'Come home: we want to see you,' although it read—'One thousand dollars per night for thirty performances.'"

"Tell me, Vida," inquired Virginia irrelevantly and quasi-playfully as they seated themselves under the edge of the balcony where Rosie could no longer see them. "Has—no one, over there—been after your heart?"

"Several," laughed the prima-donna.

"In vain?"

"Thus far."

"Which means you may change your mind?"

"Who can tell?"

"Then you did like one a little bit better than the others?"

"Yes."

"A musician?"

"No: just a good, wholesome—Englishman."

"Did you really care for him?"

"As a friend, only."

"What did you tell him?"

"That I loved art better."

Miss Vidalli laughed lightly, but Virginia's voice became more serious as she continued to question her. "But do you think you always will?"

"That depends on— Why do you ask?" said Miss Vidalli, suddenly feigning amusement to avoid a direct reply.

"Because," said Virginia lowering her voice, "the subject interests me deeply at present. I have been engaged almost a week!"

The ensuing pause became painful to Rosie. Her heart-strings seemed ready to snap, when the silence was broken by Miss Vidalli, who had evidently hesitated in order to select her

words and control her voice. "I congratulate the fortunate man with all my heart."

"Thank you," said Virginia simply. "I am the one to be congratulated: for he is the dearest, truest, best man in the world. I will introduce him to you to-night."

"Oh; he is to be here, too," observed Miss Vidalli in tones of relief.

"Of course," laughed Virginia abruptly. "We are to announce our engagement this evening. In fact——"

"Ah, at last!" Mr. Melrose exclaimed, entering at this moment with his wife. As the latter added a cordial welcome, Rosie alone observed Thornton at the entrance to the music-room, his arm outstretched to withhold the butler from entering and announcing his name.

"Why did you not let me know you were on the 'Landgraf' three years ago?" inquired Mr. Melrose. "It was mere chance that I saw you boarding the tender at Cherbourg."

The butler had disappeared, and Thornton, protected by the portières, stood listening for Miss Vidalli's answer.

"I was not out of my state-room all the way over."

"It was a rough passage."

"It never occurred to me but that you were in Florida with Mrs. and Miss Melrose."

"Every one thought so—for a time," said Mr. Melrose, with a chuckle of satisfaction. "Well—we are very proud and gratified that you have made yourself such a power that you had to be sent for to save the opera season in New York."

"I owe it all to yours and Mrs. Melrose's timely generosity—long ago. You will remember how eagerly I took advantage of it!" Miss Vidalli gave a merry laugh in which the other three joined as if a load had been lifted from their hearts. Certainly a better tone prevailed after that, though for a moment Rosie drew back in alarm at the strange expression on Thornton's face as he heard the vindication of the prima-donna's character.

The echoes of a guilty concealment produce startling effects, even in the mind of a superstitious old darkey. Rosie unquestionably felt as if she were being cremated alive until

she experienced the relief of hearing Miss Vidalli's concluding remark: "What should have kept me here?"

Thornton looked puzzled, and listened attentively as the beautiful singer continued: "Your luck seemed to follow me. The first week in Paris I was engaged to fill a vacancy at the St. Petersburg opera. You know all about my life there since then. I left Russia the middle of last month to sing ten nights at Monte Carlo. It cost New York ten thousand *francs* to break my contract."

"What is that to the money the picked-up casts have lost them?" said Mr. Melrose. "You don't know what we have endured with *grippe* epidemic in the opera company. Paleska is the only prima-donna who has not missed a performance."

At a nod from Thornton, the butler announced him in ringing accents. The prima-donna lingered expectantly in the background.

"Vida," called Virginia across the room; "here is an old friend."

"Yes: we *are* old friends! Are we not?"

said Thornton firmly, though his face seemed very white as he advanced to offer his hand.

"Indeed we are!" replied the singer sincerely, yet pale as he.

"My fiancé," Virginia said, stepping nearer and indicating Thornton with a quiet smile.

For an instant Miss Vidalli seemed petrified, but quickly recovered herself.

"Why—I thought it some one else, from the way you spoke," she said slowly, forgetful of conventional phrases.

"I was sure of it," laughed Virginia. "Now you will congratulate *me*; will you not?"

Miss Vidalli, her face betraying emotion, joined the hands of the two young people between her own and said gently: *"Both* of you!"

"Come!" said Virginia, assuming an air of gaiety and urging her forward as the butler announced Mrs. Parkinson.

"No, thanks. If you don't mind I will remain here. I still feel the motion of the ship." Sinking into an isolated sofa she began to wield a fan of white ostrich-tips with diamond studded sticks, too much the woman of the world to give further intimation of what was

passing within. Yet Rosie, who studied her closely, felt instinctively that the news of the engagement had been not only a surprise but, also, a bitter disappointment to the singer: for, she had given Thornton ample time in which to mend his heart and return to his first love—if he so desired—and that in so far as she knew he had not done so at the end of three years, was conclusive evidence that he was still faithful or at least heart free. Therefore, what more natural, if she loved him, than to return to New York full of hope—ready to sacrifice even her musical career for him, if he still demanded it.

These unhappy reflections coupled with the dangerous fact of Thornton's discovery of how wrongfully he had misjudged Miss Vidalli so overcame the agitated old darkey that she only dimly heard Mr. Melrose say:

"Virginia and Reg have something to tell you."

"No need," cried Mrs. Parkinson cheerily. "Their faces betray them."

"Mr. Wynne!" shouted the butler.

"Have you seen Vida?" Virginia asked Mrs. Parkinson, as Dick entered the room.

The widow turned and gazed wonderingly at the prima-donna's new splendour, but seeing herself observed, she advanced with a suave greeting as the butler announced:

"Mr. and Mrs. Bancker!"

"Mr. and Mrs. Van Silt!"

"Miss Stafford!"

"Mr. Benson!"

"Mrs. Hampton-Yorke!"

In the hum of general conversation Rosie was unable to distinguish anything definite that was said until Miss Vidalli moved nearer with Dick Wynne and Mrs. Parkinson.

"Virginia seems very happy," observed the latter significantly. "Two seldom love with the same degree of intensity."

"Which is it in your case?" inquired Dick.

"Tommy, of course. It 's a specialty of his. His august mother wishes it were not. He is not an angel, but the most lovable of men."

"Are you engaged to be married?" asked Miss Vidalli, with a hasty glance at the widow's half-mourning.

"It is customary to say 'no,'" was the coy response.

"May I ask the fortunate man's name?"

"Sh!" Mrs. Parkinson raised her hand to warn Dick, who said promptly: "Lord Ridgeley."

"I shall not confide in you again," pouted the widow, regarding him with approving eyes.

"Lord Ridgeley! Really!" exclaimed Miss Vidalli in surprise.

"Do you know him?" inquired Mrs. Parkinson curtly.

"I have frequently seen him."

"Then you have heard of his affair with that concert-hall singer. I might as well speak of it, for everybody was talking about it last summer at Homburg. His mother had just recaptured him and had him dangling obediently at her apron-strings when I arrived there."

"Was that not because the singer refused him?"

"Refused him? Oh dear, no! She was not that kind of a person at all."

"Yet his own mother told me she favoured the match."

"That goes to show how people garble facts," exclaimed Mrs. Parkinson, as she scanned the singer's features for some hidden truth. "Society would be extinguished if denied the privileges of exaggeration!"

"Shall you—reach London in time for the season?" inquired Miss Vidalli with a peculiar twinkle in her eye.

The widow expressed her doubt in a barely perceptible shrug.

"I have just contracted for twenty appearances at Covent Garden after the season here," continued the singer.

Mrs. Parkinson looked surprised. "Here? Are you to sing at the Metropolitan?"

"I am to make my début in 'Faust' on Wednesday evening."

"Really? Delightful! I had n't heard a word of it. Why—they 've announced Madame Akrona, the great singer from the St. Petersburg opera. I suppose she has caught the *grippe,* too. Well, one might expect it of an Italian, in this climate."

"Italian?" said Mrs. Hampton-Yorke, who was standing near, unaware of Miss Vidalli's presence. "She 's an American from Akron, Ohio. I know all about her. She 's the one Lord Ridgeley is so crazy about."

"Ridgeley!" exclaimed Mrs. Parkinson in amazement.

"Certainly. His mother wrote me all about it: and he admitted it when I saw him at luncheon to-day."

"At luncheon to-day!" gasped the widow.

"Yes: he landed here this morning, and comes to me to-morrow for a fortnight. Why, Vida!"

The prima-donna had just lowered her fan with the reflection of a suppressed smile still illuminating her perfect beauty, as Mrs. Hampton-Yorke stopped before her in frank admiration.

"Followed Akrona out here?" Mrs. Parkinson exclaimed quizzically to Dick Wynne as the full-lunged butler proclaimed the last of a long line of dinner guests:

"The Earl of Ridgeley!"

The stalwart young Englishman's progress

down the room at the side of Mrs. Melrose, was marked by a perceptible diminution of the general hum: the portières concealing the gallery-entrance to the dining-room were noiselessly drawn aside; the orchestra burst forth in tonal splendour: and the stately butler bowed his announcement of dinner before the hostess.

Mrs. Melrose stopped with the distinguished foreigner in front of Miss Vidalli. "Lord Ridgeley—Madame Akrona."

"Oh, we are old friends," said he, warmly grasping the singer's hand and drawing her to one side as the astonished guests murmured in unison: "Madame Akrona!"

"Have you seen Mrs. Parkinson?" asked Vida, making an effort to conceal her amusement behind her fan.

"That designing little widow?"

"Be careful; here she is."

Unlike the others, Mrs. Parkinson had lost no time in surprised exclamations. She had thought quickly and her prompt greeting to Lord Ridgeley was to forestall both the plans and the comments of her fellow-guests.

"What night can you dine with me?" she inquired demurely. "Ah! You look at Madame Akrona for your answer! Vida, what evening next week may I ask Lord Ridgeley and some others to meet you at dinner?"

"Thursday," replied the singer, after a moment's reflection.

"Then at eight o'clock," affirmed the little widow. "Remember that 's an engagement. Now tell me how you happen to be Madame Akrona?"

"A mere fancy. It amused me to disappear and become——"

"Celebrated," volunteered Ridgeley.

"——under another name," she continued; "and the *madame*—well, I was alone, and I thought I would chaperon myself to economise. I am still, Vida, to my friends."

"Do you think she will accept him?" said Dick in a neighbouring group.

"Insistence will win almost any woman," replied Mrs. Hampton-Yorke.

"It would be a pity," said Mrs. Bancker. "The stage can't afford to give up her glorious voice."

"It does n't need to," declared Mrs. Hampton-Yorke. "Ridgeley is an opera-fiend and would n't have her stop singing for anything—rich as he is!"

"Den she 'll marry 'im," muttered the old coloured mammy in the loggia, feeling that a tremendous load had been lifted from her heart. "She 'll marry 'im, shuh!"

A general movement being made toward the dining-room, Mr. Melrose offered his arm to Vida. "I don't understand the significance of that music," she said, with an attempt at a smile as they led the march to the dining-room. "'See the conquering hero comes!'" Mr. Melrose drew her to one side. "Here, Reg!" he called. "That music is for you and Virginia; you must lead!"

This slight diversion established the humour of the dinner company as they settled themselves about the great circular display of massive candelabra rising from a bed of exquisite blossoms, rarest crystal and gold plate. "The engagement" was the theme of conversation and "love" the theme of the music which floated out from the loggia and ravished the

senses of the listeners like the choice vintage wine in which they drank to the health of "the bride and groom to be!"

Over the heads of the orchestra Mammy Rosie was watching them with tears in her eyes and joy in her heart.

All differences had been wiped out, all misunderstandings corrected in so far as concerned the future, and if regrets remained, it was the inevitable duty of brave men and good women to leave them, unspoken, in the secret recesses of their hearts, along with the tender memories of a dead, forever vanished past. Youth lives on hope; weary old age on the promise of eternal rest from grief and pain—grateful for the small comforts of daily existence and the boon of spiritual peace.

Mammy Rosie felt that she had earned her right to both, and, with full faith in the unswerving integrity and loyalty of the young couple whose lives she had united, she stole gently back to her nook at the other end of the loggia to revel in her brilliantly conceived triumph and dream of future rewards.

"Roxana's wohk is oveh," she repeated softly,

lifting her eyes in final thanksgiving. "Yes, et suhtainly——"

Long she sat there, motionless, fascinated by the rays from the light behind her as they encircled her gray head in a golden glory and defined a mystic pathway to the frescoed ceiling beyond. Something there brought an expectant smile to her beatified face. Seraph voices were murmuring tender words of promise.

"Well," she added, her tones fading in a whispered caress. "Not *quite*—but—*most oveh!*"

[THE END.]

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